

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Annual Self- Assessment and Well-being Report 2024/25



*Blaenau Gwent – a place that is fair, open and
welcoming to all by working with and for our
communities*

Versions of the Document

If you would like this document in any other formats e.g. large print, Braille, audio version, etc. please contact the team on the details below.

Mae'r ddogfen hon ar goel yn Gymraeg
This document is available in Welsh.



This is the Council's full Self-Assessment Report for 2024/25. A supporting Executive Summary Report can be found [here](#). Alongside this, an infographic has been prepared which includes key data, as well as making each chapter of the full Self-Assessment available online to promote ease of access:

- Foreword
- Introduction
- Selecting our Objectives
- Blaenau Gwent Self-Assessment 2024/25
- Well-being Objective 1 - *Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent*
- Well-being Objective 2 - *Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities*
- Well-being Objective 3 - *Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient*
- Well-being Objective 4 - *An ambitious and innovative council delivering the quality services at the right time and in the right place*
- Key Challenges Identified for Action 2025/26 and beyond
- Performance Tables
- Characteristics of an Outstanding Council
- The Year Ahead and Beyond

The Council welcome any feedback you might have about the Self-assessment 2024/25. Your views are important to us, and we want to know what information you would like to see and how you would like to see it reported.

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Foreword

Welcome to our Annual Self-Assessment and Well-Being report for 2024/2025. The report provides an assessment of service delivery throughout the year, including what we have done well and, more importantly, where further improvements are required. The focus of the self-assessment is how we are delivering against the Council's Corporate Plan priorities, known as Well-being Objectives.

This time last year we were beginning to consider innovative plans to work more closely with Torfaen Council, through a shared Chief Executive, for an initial 9 month 'discovery phase'. This exploratory phase would consider the potential for efficiencies, resources that can work at scale, and the potential for increasing innovation and creativity across both authorities. The success of the 'discovery phase' has resulted in us entering into permanent arrangements with Torfaen Council. Faced with rising demand, particularly in social care, and increasing financial challenges, the decision was made, alongside Torfaen, to enter into a 'federated model' of service delivery. This is a new and exciting response to the sustainability challenges faced by the whole public sector in Wales.

The Council is looking to reduce the inequality experienced within the Borough and to improve overall well-being across Blaenau Gwent. Early intervention and prevention, improving the resilience and well-being of individuals and communities, and tackling the wider determinants of health, are all part of the council's medium term financial strategy and Corporate Plan. Through the implementation of the Marmot Principles and becoming a Marmot Council alongside Torfaen, to focussing on early intervention and prevention, gives us the best to change to tackle the challenges of health inequality, resilience and sustainability. By working together with Torfaen further enhances our chances of succeeding. This approach is innovative and further demonstrates our ethos of thinking about how to tackle our challenges in a different way.

Moving into 2025/26 we will endeavour to further empower our residents, giving meaningful decision-making power to our communities, giving them a real say on where resources are spent within their locality, encouraging local people to collaborate as equal partners in the design, delivery and evaluation of council services. We'll look to formalise our approach, through a new 'deal' with residents, setting out what people can expect from the Council and how residents can do their part to help us to achieve our shared missions.

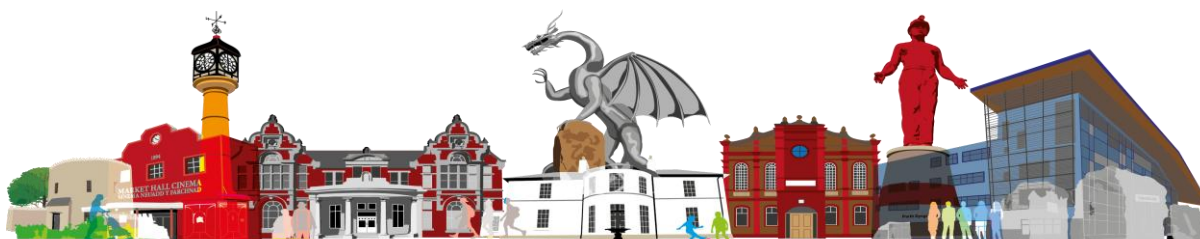
We are aiming for a future without inequality, where everyone thrives in a fair, inclusive, and resilient community. To achieve this, we must aim to create a lasting change by building trust, fostering shared responsibility, and driving innovation through strong collaboration.

We value everyone within our organisation and, as we move forward, it is reassuring to know we can rely on the dedication of all our staff working alongside partners, community groups, volunteers and elected members to continue to shape our success story.



**Councillor Stephen
Thomas**
Leader of the Council

Stephen Vickers
**Joint Chief
Executive**



Introduction

The Annual Self-Assessment and Well-Being report provides an assessment of service delivery throughout 2024/25, including what we have done well and, more importantly, where further improvements are required.

This self-assessment has been developed and includes the information available at a point in time. The Council's approach to self-assessment is an ongoing and fluid process of review, and the assessment will be updated as and when more information becomes available. Though much of this report looks back on what has been delivered throughout 2024/25, it also sets the scene for significant organisational change that is required, up to 2027 and beyond.

The self-assessment has been written to consider:

- **How well are we doing? Narrative of the activity that has taken place;**
- **How do we know? Qualitative and quantitative evidence provided; and**
- **What and how can we do better? Actions to implement over the coming years. .**

Like all public bodies across Wales, we are required to comply with certain statutory duties. This Self-Assessment and Well-Being Report, combines our statutory reporting requirements and statutory publishing duties, under both the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 and the Local Government and Elections Act 2021. Both Acts require:

- An annual report to be published to report of our progress against our Well-being objectives (WBFG Act 2015); and
- Publication of an annual Self-Assessment Report (LG&E Act 2021), setting out the extent to which we are meeting our performance requirements.

Local Government & Elections Act 2021

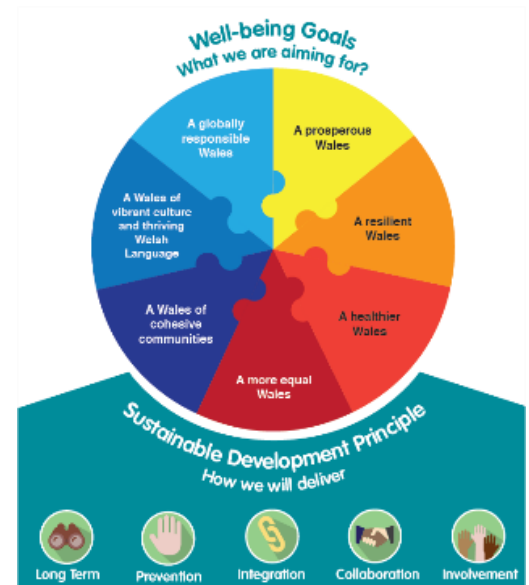
This is our fourth report, under the requirements of the Local Government and Elections Act 2021 and at the heart of this new performance regime, is the requirement for all councils to keep their performance arrangements under review. Councils need to do this through robust, continuous self-assessment of their findings, of which are reported through this annual report.

Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015

The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 (WBFG Act) puts into law seven priority well-being goals that all public bodies are required to work towards. It details the way in which public bodies must work and collaborate with each other to improve the well-being of Wales.

In working towards these goals, public bodies are required to consider the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other, and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change.

This report demonstrates how we have linked our key priority well-being objective areas to this Act and our commitment towards it.



Selecting Our Objectives

We are committed to making Blaenau Gwent more equal and sustainable through the delivery of our Corporate Plan. The Corporate Plan acts as the Council's business plan and sets out the vision, values and priorities for 2022/27. It outlines not only what the people of Blaenau Gwent can expect from the Council but equally, what the Council is asking from its citizens and partners. We want to support residents to become more independent in order to reduce demand. Working in this way will ensure we are getting the most out of our limited resources; by focussing on this mission, we will secure value for money and improve people's lives whilst simultaneously reducing costs.

This strong positive relationship is focussed on addressing the same problems in order to deliver healthier, happier, more independent communities that will make for a sustainable, prosperous Blaenau Gwent. Resilient communities sit at the heart of the council being more sustainable and will result in us being able to spend the limited resources available to us more efficiently, needing to spend less money on those Council services that cost the most money.

We continue to take our aspirations forward in all that we do and, over the last 12 months, a number of key fundamental pieces of work have been undertaken as we work towards delivering our Corporate Plan and become a more sustainable and resilient Council. Some of these areas have been pulled out below but are referred to frequently throughout the report.

Federated Approach

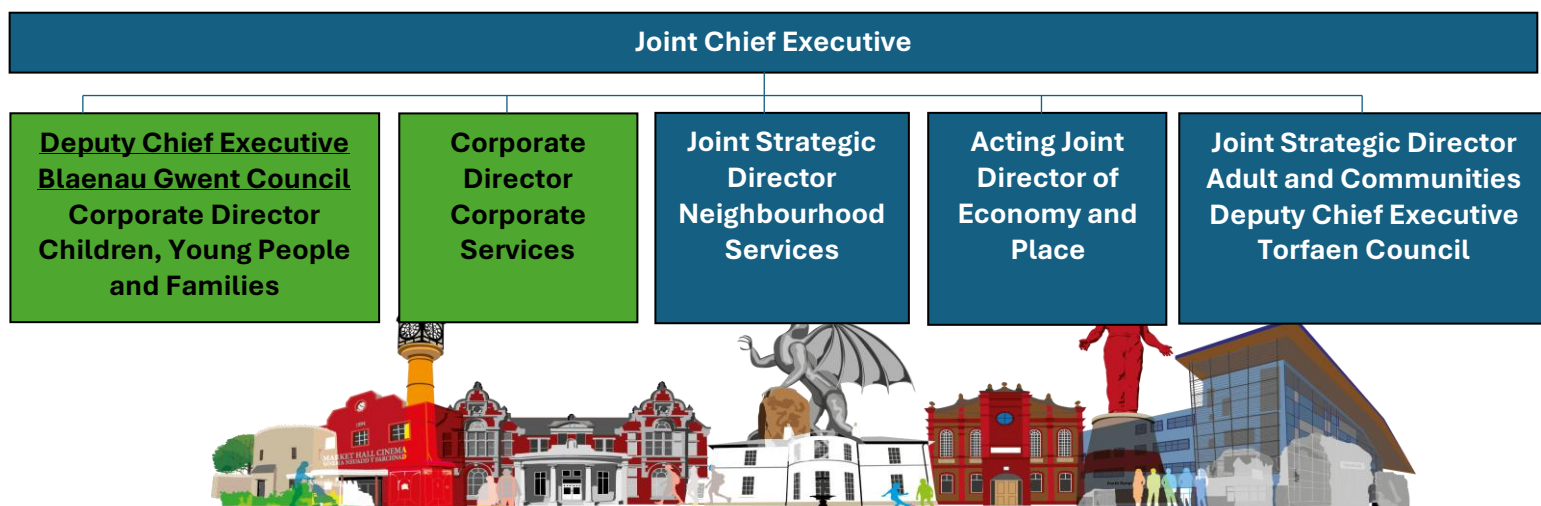
Blaenau Gwent Council entered into an innovative collaborative working agreement with Torfaen Council during 2024/25, with the first Joint Chief Executive post in Wales. An initial 'discovery phase' was initially agreed in June 2024, to begin exploring the potential for efficiencies and for increasing innovation and creativity across both authorities.

Both councils are taking a forward-thinking approach to address current challenges and address future demands. It is recognised that local government in its current form is facing an uncertain and unsustainable future, therefore the Elected Members and Officers across both councils are taking a proactive stance in finding new solutions that go beyond the usual 'salami-slicing' approach. This has led to an open consideration to align the councils to create a strong, strategic foundation for the change that is needed. In January 2025 both Councils agreed to make these arrangements permanent.

Corporate Structure

For a number of years Blaenau Gwent Council operated with a temporary senior management structure. It was recognised that this was unsustainable and not conducive for moving the organisation forward. The agreement in January 2025 to work with a Joint Chief Executive paved the way for making the organisational structure more stable and productive.

The corporate structure in Blaenau Gwent Council sees a number of in place (working just within Blaenau Gwent shown in green) and joint posts (working across both Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen Council's shown in blue) now operational:



Marmot Masterplan and the Communities Approach

Following Gwent Public Service Board's (PSB) commitment to become a Marmot region, and Torfaen Council's approach to become a Marmot Council, Blaenau Gwent has also taken on this mantle and is systematically reshaping the Council's operating model. A 'Communities Approach' is being designed to ensure we are not just saying the right things and doing more of the same but that we are delivering real tangible change.

As part of this process the Council has worked to develop a Marmot Masterplan working alongside Torfaen Council. The 'Masterplan' is an ambitious programme of work that will be implemented and measured in the short (end of year), medium (end of Council term in 2027) and long term (end of Masterplan in 2030). The Council has been working to align all of its monitoring, via the business planning approach, to the Masterplan.

In common with other regions of Gwent, it's an unfortunate fact that communities in Blaenau Gwent face some of the worst health disparities in Wales. Addressing generational inequality across the county, demands that we take a longer-term perspective. Being a Marmot Council, offers us a chance to focus, and to use our resources and wide-ranging influence to tackle sources of inequality.

This approach has enabled us to work with Torfaen Council to develop a Masterplan. This Masterplan builds on and dovetails our existing Corporate Plan. It recognises a need to plan over a longer period of time, in the knowledge that this work will take us well beyond the current Corporate Plan for 2027. Our Corporate Plan continues to remain active and relevant, representing the first 5 years of our journey towards our longer-term aspiration to reduce inequity in Blaenau Gwent. Furthermore, our Masterplan shows we are serious about our role and our commitment to adopting the principles of being a Marmot Council, over future generations.

The Council has in place a Corporate Plan Annual Delivery Plan as well as supporting service level business plans. The implementation of these supports a contribution to a much longer-term endeavour. Activity is not linked to a single year but supports us in our journey and aspirations for the future. Furthermore, these aspirations go well beyond the end of our current Corporate Plan in 2027 and are part of a longer-term journey, as we aim to meet the needs of future generations.

Future Development of the Marmot Masterplan

The measures listed in our Masterplan will continue to be refined and improved over time as new datasets become available or are developed internally. In doing so we will ensure that the plan is always being supported with the best possible data to evidence the impacts of our actions, including those associated with the recommendations made in the 'Building a Fairer Gwent' report.

Importantly, the adoption of the Marmot principles and the development of the outcomes and measures represent only a small part of the work we must do to become a Marmot council. In order for Blaenau Gwent and our partners to have any meaningful impact on the wider determinants of health the approach must penetrate all parts of the organisation and run far beyond reporting against a list of outcome measures.

Through our planning processes, we are therefore questioning how we do things, adjusting as necessary to ensure we are maximising the impact on sources of inequality and inequity in Blaenau Gwent. We are serious about our role and our commitment to adopting the principles of being a Marmot Council, but this must be matched by our actions. Therefore, reviewing what we do and how we measure impact will be under constant review in the years to come, as we develop stronger delivery mechanisms to reach our outcomes.

Without doing so, we will never be able to address the social determinants of health, which, for the residents of Blaenau Gwent, will inevitably mean they are far less likely to reach their full potential and far more likely in the future to be the recipient of a Council or wider public service intervention.



The Characteristics of an Outstanding Council

Following the approach undertaken in Torfaen, Blaenau Gwent has further developed and adopted the characteristics of becoming an outstanding Council.

As an organisation it is important to not only review the services we are delivering to our residents and businesses, and the impact they are having, but we must also ensure that our own internal processes and systems are working well, ensuring we are using the resources available to us as efficiently and effectively as possible, with robust controls, systems and processes supporting every aspect of the Council's activity.

Where our Corporate Plan focuses on the improvements we will deliver for the people who live and work within Blaenau Gwent, our framework for an Outstanding Council sets out how we will become a more efficient and effective organisation, better equipped to deliver our Corporate Plan aspirations. In the same way as we do for the Corporate Plan; we will monitor the key actions that we believe will take us forward to become an outstanding Council.

This year will be the first time of the Council reporting against the Characteristics of an Outstanding Council. This detail can be found at page 63 to 83.

The framework for an Outstanding Council was developed considering what is important for the Council to deliver, as well as embracing the Well-Being of Future Generations Act 2015 by giving consideration to the sustainability principle, and the 7 defined areas of corporate governance. These characteristics, along with our organisational values, will help us to create the right conditions to apply the 5 ways of working in a consistent and meaningful way.

Each characteristic is supported by a defined definition to assist us in the delivery, monitoring and evaluation of them. This enables the Council to be clear on the areas the Council is looking to improve in pursuit of being an outstanding council

Our Corporate Plan 2022/27

Our Corporate Plan was adopted by Council in October 2022 and will be in place for the duration of the existing Council administration, up to 2027. The Corporate Plan sets out an ambitious programme of activity for the Council in order to support communities to thrive. The Corporate Plan is the Council's commitment to the communities of Blaenau Gwent, to provide modern and high quality services which support economic growth and well-being.

Although our approach to communities, Marmot, and the federated model have been implemented since, they do not change our Corporate Plan, only strengthen our ability to deliver it.

The Plan outlines four high level priorities, also known as Well-being Objectives, each of which are underpinned by solid and sustainable business plans, which describe the activity to be undertaken by each service area of the Council, ensuring the Council can be held to account for what it has promised to deliver. The Corporate Plan 2022/27 Well-being Objectives are:

- **Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent;**
- **Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities;**
- **An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place; and**
- **Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient.**

The Council has a responsibility to the people of Blaenau Gwent to help improve the social, economic and environmental well-being of the area. By setting a small number of strategic priorities within



the Corporate Plan it will allow efforts to be concentrated on delivery in these areas and ultimately, help to improve the quality of the lives of residents.

The Objectives have been developed using extensive research and understanding of local community need following various engagement activities. Owing to the timing of the development of the Gwent Well-being Plan and the development of the Council's Corporate Plan, evidence from the Well-being Needs Assessment and

public consultation were used as evidence for the Corporate Plan. The main areas of priority emerged as:

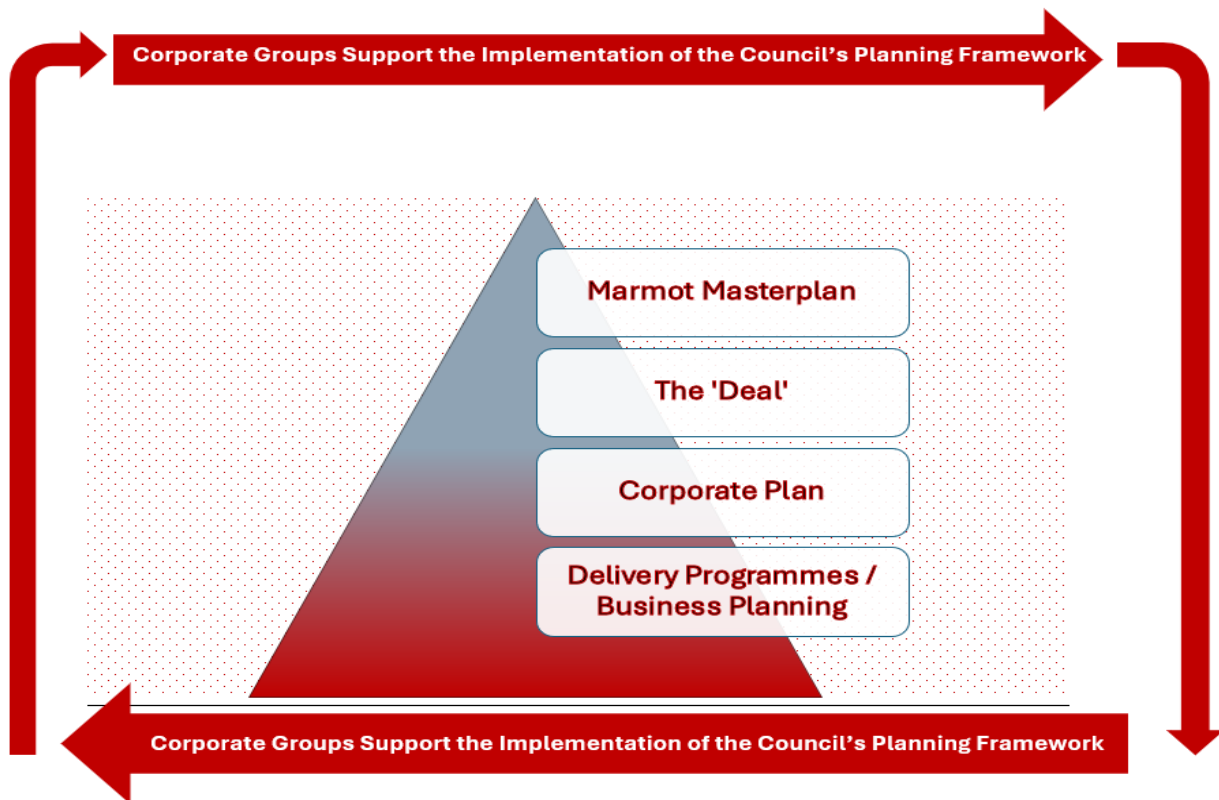
- Reducing the inequalities that exist within our communities – this directly links to the Corporate Plan priority - Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent as well as the targeted work being undertaken by the Council's Cost of Living working group;
- Creating safe communities – this directly links to the Corporate Plan priority - Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient;
- Protecting and enhancing the natural environment - this directly links to the Corporate Plan priority - Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities; and
- In order to work towards delivery of the priorities, the Council needs to be able to do this effectively and within resources, therefore, a fourth priority has been developed specifically for the Council - An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place.

A full version of our Corporate Plan is available to download here [corporate-plan-2022-2027.pdf \(blaenau-gwent.gov.uk\)](#)

Sitting within our Corporate Plan is our statutory Well-being Statement which explains in more detail how we have derived our objectives and how they will contribute to the 7 national well-being goals of the Well-being of Future Generations Act. Our Well-Being statement also acts as a key driver for improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Blaenau Gwent by seeking to ensure 'that the needs of the present are met, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.

As well as our Corporate Plan, there are a range of other key documents that provide a clear direction and vision for the future, based on the needs and aspirations of the local communities. These align with our Corporate Plan objectives and organisational vision to ensure that we can deliver services and make improvements.





Gwent Public Service Board

The Gwent Public Service Board (PSB) is a statutory partnership that brings together public services from across Gwent to improve well-being, both now, and in the long term. PSB's are required to assess the well-being of the area they cover and form well-being plans on a five-year cycle. Membership of the Gwent PSB can be viewed [here](#).

Gwent PSB adopted its first [Well-being Plan](#) in July 2023, setting out how public services will collaborate to respond to some of Gwent's key well-being challenges. The plan runs from 2023-25 and sets out two interconnected well-being objectives and five underpinning steps to be delivered over a five-year delivery period. Gwent PSB well-being objectives:

1. We want to create a fairer, more equitable and inclusive Gwent for all; and
2. We want a climate-ready Gwent, where our environment is valued and protected, benefitting our well-being now and for future generations.

Five underpinning steps:

1. Take action to reduce the cost-of-living crisis in the longer term;
2. Provide and enable the supply of good quality, affordable, appropriate homes;
3. Taking action to reduce our carbon emissions, help Gwent adapt to climate change, and protect and restore our natural environment;
4. Enable and support people, neighbourhoods, and communities to be resilient, connected, thriving and safe; and
5. Take action to address inequities, particularly in relation to health, through the framework of the Marmot Principles.



To support the PSB to tackle the high levels of inequality across Gwent, it has begun working with the Institute of Health Equity, using guiding principles identified in Professor Marmot's review, [Fair Society, Healthy Lives](#), for achieving greater health equity. Since the original review, a further two principals have been identified, as important to improving health. The 8 Marmot Principles:

1. Give every child the best start in life	2. Enable all children, young people, and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives.	3. Create fair employment and good work for all.	4. Ensure a healthy standard of living for all.
5. Create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities.	6. Strengthen the role and impact of ill-health prevention.	7. Tackle racism, discrimination, and their outcomes.	8. Pursue environmental sustainability and health equity together.

The regional Gwent PSB Delivery Plan 2024-28 is centred around four Areas of Focus for well-being as agreed by the PSB in December 2023, aiming to address some of the recommendations from the [Building a Fairer Gwent: Improving Health Equity & the Social Determinants](#) report through the regional well-being delivery plan:

- Everyone has the Best Start in Life;
- Everyone has the same Economic Chances;
- Everyone lives in a Place they feel Safe; and
- Everyone lives in Climate-ready Communities where our Environment is Valued and Protected.

The Blaenau Gwent Local Well-being Partnership (LWP) is the Local Delivery Group of the Gwent PSB. The Partnership has identified local well-being priorities aligned to the regional Well-being Plan through public and stakeholder engagement. Some key areas of focus and priorities which have clearly emerged from stakeholder engagement activity, which were adopted by the LWP in June 2024 are:

Travel and Transport	Food	Reducing Inequalities	Climate and Nature
- Active Travel - Community Transport - Sustainable & low-emission Transport uptake	- Food Insecurity & access to affordable food - Access to healthy food - Local food growing - Developing the local Food Economy & Community Food Initiatives	- Tackling Poverty & Cost-of-Living - Services, support and signposting for Older People - Tackling Loneliness & Social Isolation - Volunteering & local network of community groups	- Access to Land & local Green Spaces - Nature & Biodiversity loss, awareness raising and making the most of our natural environment - Local involvement in regional climate programmes

The LWP identified that regional Delivery Plan

the should



be data and outcomes oriented, whilst providing an opportunity for the Local Delivery Group to focus on what they hope to achieve locally for the benefit of their communities and follow an evidence-based approach to make a meaningful, lasting impact.

For more info please see recent report to the Partnerships Scrutiny Committee in April 2025:

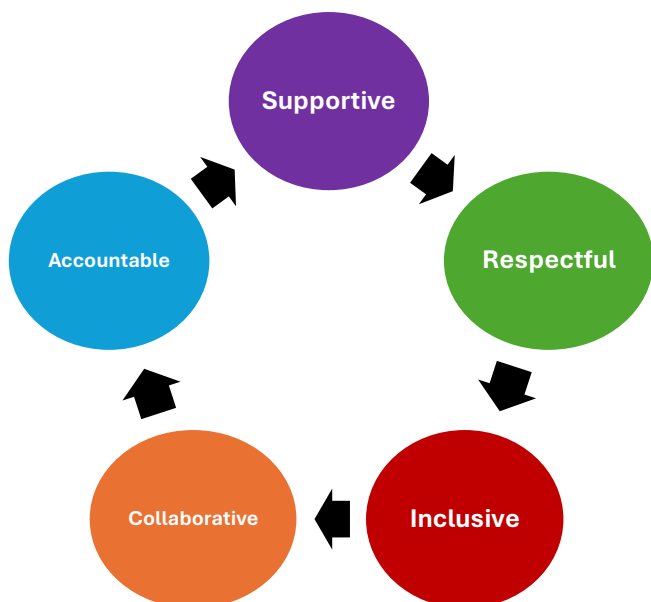
<https://democracy.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/documents/s17298/Report.pdf?LLL=0>

The Council's Vision and Values

The ethos of our reconfigured Executive Team places a strong emphasis on collective responsibility and mutual support to achieve shared goals, in working towards our Well-being Objectives. The Council's vision is:

'Blaenau Gwent – a place that is fair, open and welcoming to all by working with and for our communities'

The core values of our council are - to be:



Our Vision and Values reflect who we are as a Council, how we do things, and how we are shaping the future by ensuring that these apply to everything we do. Our values play an essential part in the culture of our organisation.

Our values will only be made real by the behaviour we demonstrate. This includes how we do things; how we treat others; what we say and how we say it.

The changes we continue to make to our organisation will put our vision and values as well as sustainability at the heart of everything that we do, both in terms of what we are looking to achieve, but also in the way we will work towards our objectives.

Blaenau Gwent Annual Self-Assessment 2024/25

Blaenau Gwent Council looks to operate as a self-improving organisation, whereby there is a recognition of what has gone well, but, and most importantly, it



recognises where improvements are to be made. Honest and open self-assessment is fundamental to realising our ambition.

The Council works to respond to the following questions in all the work that it undertakes:

- **Is the Council exercising its functions effectively?**
- **Is the Council using its resources economically, efficiently and effectively?**
- **Are the governance arrangements of the Council effective for securing continuous improvement?**

Our Self-Assessment provides an overview of the work that has been undertaken throughout 2023/24 and has been written to consider:

- **How well are we doing? Narrative of the activity that has taken place;**
- **How do we know? Qualitative and quantitative evidence provided; and**
- **What and how can we do better? Actions to implement over the coming years.**

Our self-assessment report is an aggregation of all self-assessment work undertaken over the previous year. Our report has been through a rigorous process to ensure it is informed by a wide range of evidence and that the conclusions being drawn are the right ones.

The focus of the Annual Self-Assessment is the Blaenau Gwent Council's Corporate Plan priorities, known as Well-being Objectives, and providing an assessment of how well the Council feels it has achieved against these during 2024/25 and the challenges to progressing these. We have also provided a review of our first year in working towards becoming an outstanding Council.

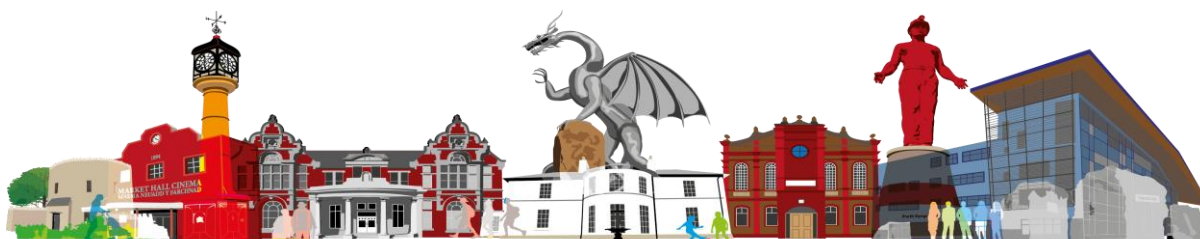
The Corporate Plan – Annual Delivery Plan 2024/25 Reporting against our Well-being Objectives

The Corporate Plan 2022/27 commits the Council to 4 high-level ambitions that we are working to deliver on over the lifespan of Plan. These ambitions are reviewed on a regular basis and as schemes and projects are developed, form part of an annual delivery plan each year - moving our ambition into action. This approach is particularly important so that the plan can be iterative and agile and so that new initiatives, challenges, and

opportunities can be responded to, throughout the lifespan of the plan.

Our Annual Delivery Plan highlights the key activities we planned for 2024/25, in meeting our ambitions, as set out within our Corporate Plan, and aligned to the areas for improvement from last year's Self-Assessment. An overview of progress against each objective is set out below:

Corporate Plan Priorities 2024/25				
	Blue (action completed)	Green (action on target)	Amber (action off target with a route back to green)	Red (action off target significant concerns)
Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent	2	18	3	2
Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities	0	3	5	0
Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient	1	7	5	0

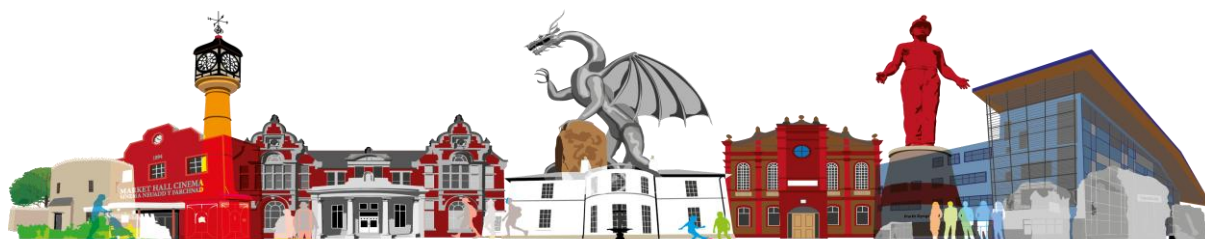


An ambitious and innovative council delivering quality services at the right time and in the right place	2	8	3	1
Total	5	36	16	3

Under each Well-being Objective is an annual delivery plan supported by operational business plans. Overall, for 2024/25, the majority of actions, contributing to the Well-being Objectives, have been achieved, however, we fully recognise that we still have a number of challenges to address and further work is to be undertaken to fully achieve each of our long term aims. The breakdown is:

- Completed (Blue) – 8%
- On Target (Green) – 60%
- Behind Target but with a plan to get back on track (Amber) – 27%
- Behind Target with significant concerns (Red) – 5%

A full report setting out in more detail the progress made against each of our Well-Being Objectives was received by Council in July 2025 and is available [here](#). The following section of this report highlights our progress over the last year, against a selection of key activities, under each of our 4 Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives.

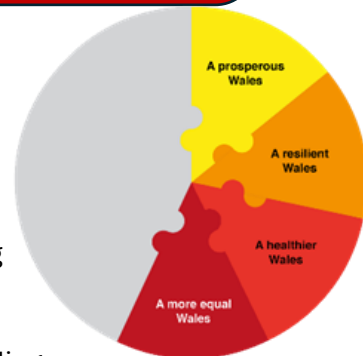


Well-being Objective 1

Maximise learning and skills for all to create a prosperous, thriving, resilient Blaenau Gwent

Why This Is Important as an Area of Focus - Improving the quality and provision of teaching and learning is vitally important to ensure the service is achieving ambitious outcomes for all. The Council will continue to invest in services in order to support economic development and regeneration in order to provide opportunities for local people and businesses.

What We Aim to Achieve – An increase in the resilience of the community, providing high quality educational and skills opportunities to create a thriving economy from birth onwards, minimising dependence and maximising independence. The authority aims to ensure that all children and young people are given the best start in life, enabling them to grow into fruitful adults living a healthy and fulfilling life whilst contributing to society and forming a valuable part of their community.

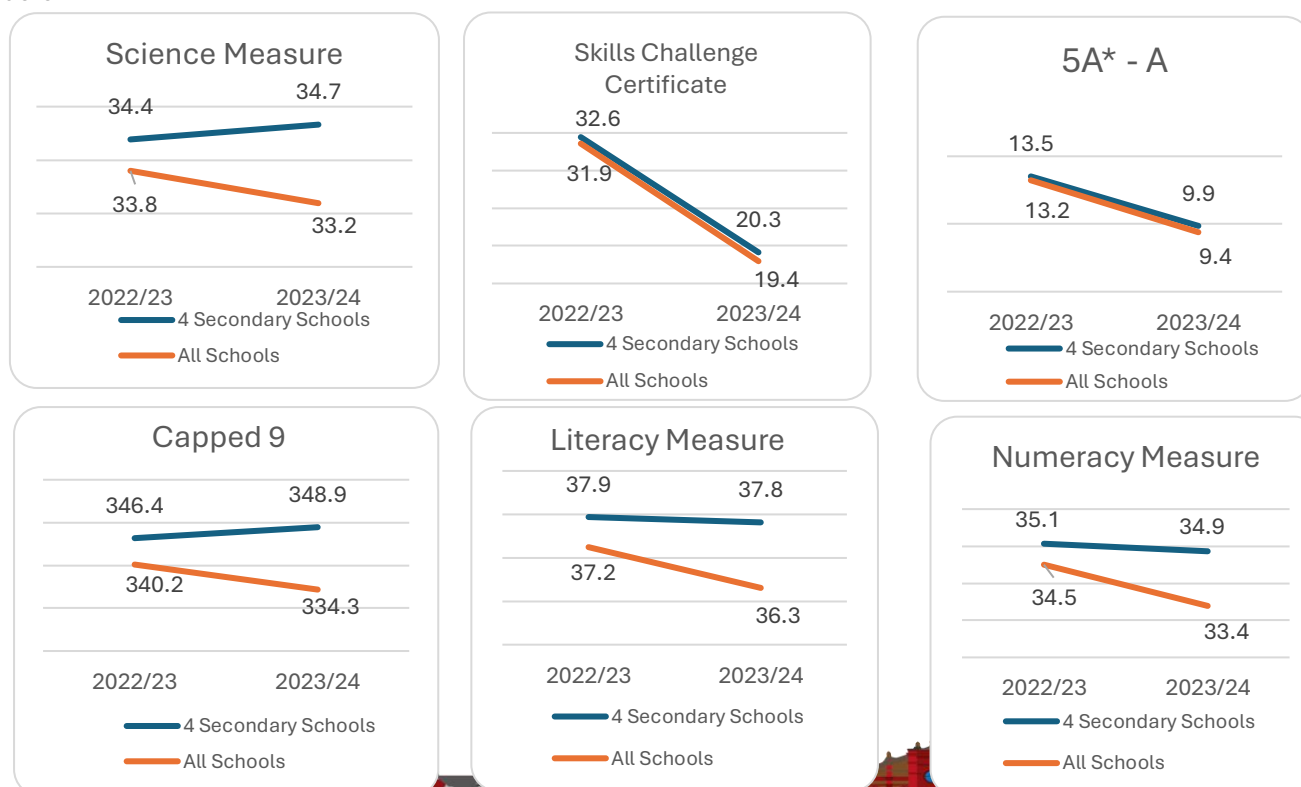


How well are we doing?

The following narrative provides an evaluative reflection of the activity, undertaken throughout 2024/25, across service areas that directly support this Well-being Objective. The narrative reflects what has gone well but also, and more importantly, where we are experiencing challenges. These challenges have then been collated together at the end of each section. These areas will be identified as areas of focus moving forward and will be reported as part of our next Self-Assessment, as well as performance monitoring throughout the year.

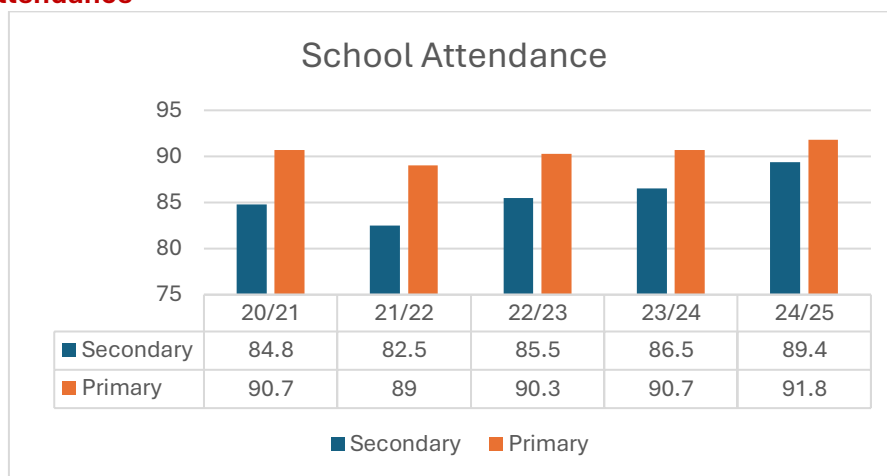
Raising attainment within our schools

In 2024 all Key Stage 4 examination indicators declined when compared to 2023, as it did across Wales. Performance was, for the most part, in line with Welsh government modelled estimates. The majority of schools' performance in the Capped Points score, Literacy measure and Skills Challenge, exceeded that of the family average, with half the schools exceeding it in the Numeracy and Science measures. However, no school performed above the family average in relation to the 5A*-A measure. Some examples are shown below:



(Note: the significant decline in the Skills Challenge Certificate measure was due to 1 Secondary School not entering any pupils for the qualification and the cohort number still having to be used in the calculation)

Increasing Pupil Attendance



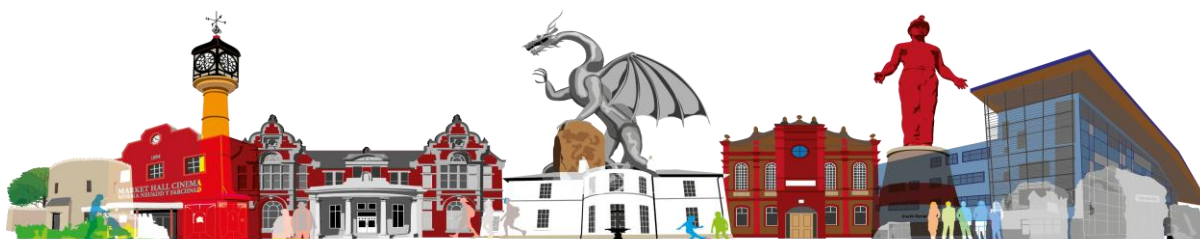
On an annual basis school attendance is showing an increase in both primary and secondary schools. Attendance figures in Blaenau Gwent are mirroring those of national trends. Incidents of fixed term exclusions and the number of days lost during the year decreased in secondary schools when compared with the previous year. This is the opposite for Children Looked After (CLA) whereby the number of incidents and days lost increased. The primary reason why exclusions are issued continues to be for persistent disruptive behaviour particularly in respect of secondary aged pupils. 15 primary schools issued exclusions this year compared to 17 schools for the same period last year, but despite this, both the number of exclusions and days lost have continued to increase. The Education Welfare Service are working closely with those schools to support early intervention to further reduce exclusions.

Data analysis	Number of Exclusions (Inc/Dec)	Days of Exclusion (Inc/Dec)	Permanent Exclusions (Inc/Dec)
Secondary	625 (-243)	769 (-280)	8 (+3)
Primary	220 (+45)	291 (+25.5)	2 (-1)
Special Schools	79 (+56)	113 (+57.5)	0
Increase/ Decrease (-)	-142	-197	2

There has been an increase in the number of exclusions and days lost in both Special Schools, although the majority of exclusions relate to one school. The Education Welfare Service are working with the school to look at support that can be provided to address reasons behind exclusions. The 3 main reasons for exclusions across all settings are:

- persistent disruptive behaviour (287);
- verbal abuse/threatening behaviour against an adult (179); and
- physical assault against a pupil (153).

Note - When analysing exclusion data, it can include learners who are excluded more than once.



Working with our schools and communities to improve attendance is a core priority for the Education Directorate. The Council are running a media campaign this year #everydaymatters to highlight the importance of good attendance and to direct families to support.

The Council introduced an attendance pathway in September 2023 and most schools that have implemented all aspects of the pathway have seen an increase to their attendance rates. The Education Welfare Team will continue to support all schools to use the Attendance Pathway this academic year. The Education Welfare Team will also continue to work closely with schools this year, undertaking planned activities such as visiting families to support them where there are attendance concerns.

Schools causing concern

At the start of the academic year 2024/25 and continuing, one school was in a category, The River Centre. The school is in receipt of enhanced support from the Local Authority and the Education Achievement Service (EAS).



During the year Brynbach Primary was removed from Estyn follow up in April 2025 and All Saints Primary are waiting for their follow up meeting with Estyn which should take place in Autumn Term 2025. It is expected that the school will be removed from follow up. Following an inspection in the summer term, Abertillery Learning Community was placed in significant improvement.

An additional 3 schools are receiving targeted support from the Local Authority /EAS as identified during the Professional Discussion process. These schools received support and challenge on a half termly basis, in order to monitor progress and improvements. Professional Discussions are an important way for the LA to engage with schools to ensure their priorities for improvement are being implemented and are having impact, and to identify and offer appropriate support where relevant.

Entitlement to Free School Meals (eFSM)

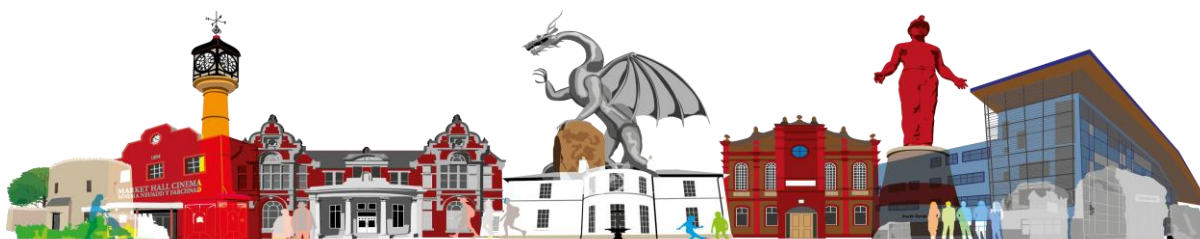
Blaenau Gwent has consistently had amongst the highest numbers of pupils entitled to Free School Meals, when compared to other Local Authorities in Wales. An anomaly in the process, by which statuses were being recorded artificially, inflated the numbers in 2020/21 and 2021/22, with numbers now returning to pre-Covid levels.

Indicator	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Entitlement to FSM (Pupils aged 5 – 15)	25.5%	31.4%	33.3%	24.6%	24.1%	25.3%
Entitlement to FSM (All pupils)	23.7%	28.4%	30.3%	22.3%	21.9%	23.2%

Current levels of pupils entitled to FSM rank Blaenau Gwent as having the 6th highest local authority in Wales. This would appear to conflict with other measures of deprivation across Blaenau Gwent, compared to other Local Authorities, where levels of deprivation are higher than other local authorities.

Elected Home Education (EHE) Pupils

There has been an increase in the number of electively home-educated (EHE) children within Blaenau Gwent over the past few years. EHE pupils continue to be supported by the Education Welfare Service; this support will be monitored closely going forward to ensure that the number of visits continue to increase in line with the figures. There are currently 229 pupils on the EHE database compared to 158 for the same period last



year. This is an increase of 44.9%. 36 of these pupils are from the Gypsy Roma Traveller Community (GRT).

Children Looked After (CLA)

At the end of March 2025, 201 children were being looked after by the Local Authority. Although there has been a small decrease over the year, the number still remains high.

A total of 10 CLA (7%) experienced at least one or more non-transitional school moves during 2023/24. This is a decrease when compared with the previous academic year when the figure was 17 children (13%).

Consistency of schooling continues to be considered as part of the matching process when a CLA moves placement. Transport is provided where necessary to ensure the stability of schooling. When a child does have to move school, processes are in place to ensure that delays in admissions are avoided, wherever possible.

At the end of academic year 2023/24:

- 141 children of statutory school age were looked after by Blaenau Gwent local authority. This is an increase compared with the previous year when the figure was 136;
- The majority of children who are looked after by Blaenau Gwent continue to be educated within Blaenau Gwent and attend mainstream schools. A small proportion of our CLA attend more specialist education settings;
- There has been a further increase in the number of CLA accessing Local Authority maintained special school placements - a total of 14 in 2023-2024 compared with 11 in 2022-2023 and 9 in 2021-2022;
- There has been a further reduction in the number of CLA attending independent school settings outside Blaenau Gwent – a total of 2 in 2023/24, compared with 3 in 2022/23 and 7 in 2021-2022;
- Almost all learners achieved recognised qualifications at the end of their statutory school studies in 2023-2024 with the majority now engaged in post 16 educational and/ or training opportunities; and
- During academic year 2023/24, 67% of Personal Education Plans for newly accommodated children were initiated within statutory timescales. This is a decrease when compared with the previous year when the figure was 88%. A total of 8 plans were not initiated within 10 days. This was as a result of 4 learners being Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children who were not in school at the point of becoming looked after. The 4 learners have since been admitted to schools and have education plans in place.

Additional Learning Needs (ALN)

- The Local Authority has made good progress in aligning the ALN legislative duties to the reform programme. There are only 20 outstanding Statements of Special Educational Needs to be converted to Local Authority Individual Development Plans (Spring 25), compared to 140 in the same period last year.
- In most cases ALN duties are now completed within statutory timescales with only a few being inhibited by required extensions.
- All required processes to allow the Local Authority and schools to fulfil ALN legislative duties (0-25) have been fully developed and are in place – these are effectively monitored and evaluated on a biannual basis to ensure changes can be made to align with any changes needed as the new duties evolve.
- Training, development and review is ongoing in terms of ALN implementation and the support available from the Local Authority to the schools is comprehensive and increasingly responsive to monitoring and evaluation conducted by Officers.
- Most Additional Learning Needs Coordinators and the Early Years Additional Learning Needs Coordinators have appropriate knowledge regarding the importance of early identification, planning and carrying out high-quality transition activities in order to ensure a smooth pathway to the next step of their education.
- There is good progress in many Autistic Spectrum Disorder settings with including learners into the mainstream setting, giving a strong platform for re-inclusion.
- Most pupils in Learning/Learner Resource Base make at least expected progress in line with their abilities and stage of development.



- Phase 1 and 2 of the ALN Resource Base Review and consultation have been successfully completed with 40 additional ASD places created across primary, Welsh medium and secondary settings – this has effectively reduced the number of out of county placements and numbers on waiting lists.
- The purpose of the River Centre has been successfully re-evaluated, resulting in all pupils being single registered since January 2024.
- Collaborative working between education, social care, and health has improved which has led to better early identification of additional learning needs and complex health needs.
- In many cases Post 16 ALN transition planning is working well; however, in a few cases this has not been effective.
- The vision for inclusion, which aligns with the ALN Code of Practice, in our mainstream schools, is supported by the ALN Implementation Lead Officer. In addition, the Inclusion Team commissions the Inclusive Practice Service to continue supporting schools on a systemic basis and individual pupils where required.

Education Finance

The Council aims to deliver effective and efficient services within the financial constraints. The Local Authority has a track record of spending within its education budget in recent years, with relatively small underspends for the past three years against the overall education budget.

The Council allocated £53.705 million to schools in 2024/25 via the Individual Schools Budget (ISB) to provide high quality education and to improve pupil outcomes. In addition, Blaenau Gwent continues to make a financial contribution to the regional EAS arrangements which was £283,537 for the financial year. Processes such as monthly Local Authority /EAS Partnership meetings are in place to ensure the Local Authority can hold the EAS to account for the support and challenge they provide to schools and ensure value for money for the Local Authority.

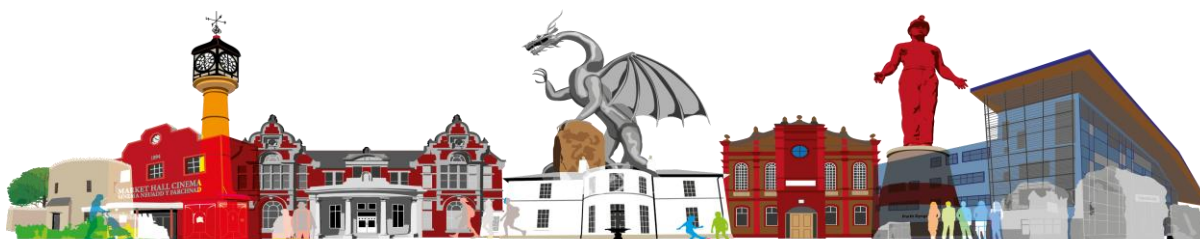
The ISB in 2025/26 is £7.274m higher than it was in the previous year. This is a 13.54% increase and is made up of:

- £2.392m cost pressure funding (to fund the development of new resource bases and prior years school pressures with regards pay awards and utilities);
- £963k transferred into the ISB from other Education Budgets (due to the River Centre moving to Single Status registration); and
- £3.919m in relation to Grants transferring in from Welsh Government and to fund the current years pay award and increments.

School balances dropped from £1.204 million at the end of the 2023/24 to a deficit position of £1.321 million at the end of the 2024/25. The overall level has reduced by £2.525 million, with 10 schools in a deficit position.

- Primary school balances have dropped from £1.669 million to £0.489 million;
- Secondary school balances have fallen from £38,000 to a deficit position of £177,000;
- All through school balances have dropped from a deficit of £597,000 to a deficit of £1.183 million; and
- Special schools have dropped from £94,000 to a deficit of £450,000.

The Council has committed to funding teachers' pay awards for future, however there is a risk that school balances will be depleted further by March 2026. Many Schools are unable to produce a balanced budget for 2025/2026. Given the level of deficits, Schools are being supported to produce deficit reduction plans over the short to medium term which will identify financial efficiencies and the impact of those efficiencies. These plans will be considered by the Deputy Chief Executive Blaenau Gwent and Strategic Director Children, Young People and Families and the Corporate Director of



Corporate Services. School cost pressures will continue to be reported within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

Deprivation and Educational Outcomes

The Local Authority provides a range of support to tackle inequalities in education experiences and outcomes for children living in poverty and data is used well to target interventions appropriately. This work includes providing free school meals, period equity, vulnerable learners support, Youth Service and youth support services, family engagement officers, school holiday provision and post 16 transport. There are also many strengths in the services to support the well-being of children and young people and to promote positive relationships. Support has been provided to schools to provide an environment where health and well-being is at the heart of the curriculum, ensuring support and appropriate interventions are accessible, with a specific emphasis on vulnerable and disadvantaged learner categories. A whole school approach self-evaluation tool has been rolled out which encourages schools to assess the key barriers to learning and to provide specific support relating to the emotional and mental well-being of the child. It encourages schools to question how inequality can impact on the learning and life outcomes of a child and fosters an inclusive and caring environment.

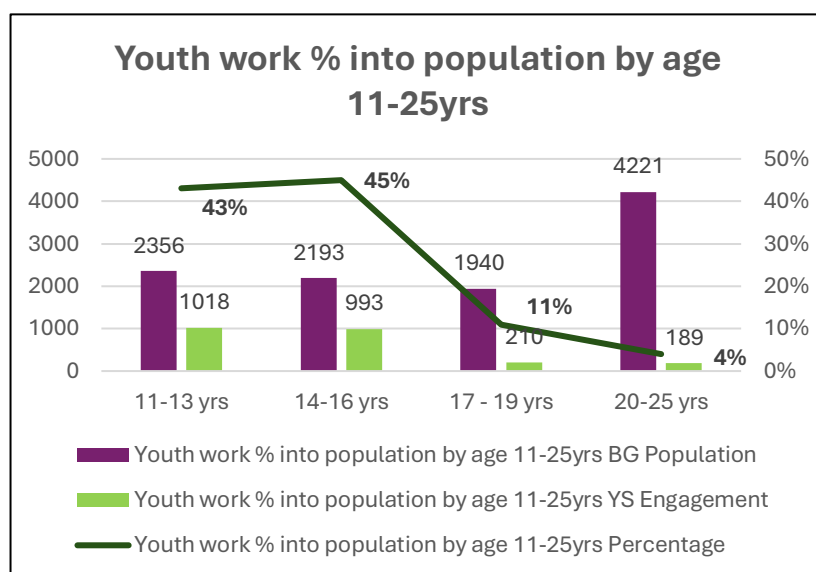
Improving outcomes for our children and young people

7 schools were inspected in the academic year 2024/25. 6 of the schools inspected received positive Estyn reports and were not placed in a category. The schools were Glanhwy, Saint Josephs, Glyncoed, Sofrydd, Bro Helyg and Willowtown. Although Estyn identified a number of strengths when it inspected Abertillery Learning Community, in particular the strong leadership from the headteacher, the school was placed in the category significant improvement.

Youth Service

Blaenau Gwent Youth Service offers a comprehensive range of services for young people aged 11-25 years, centred upon voluntary engagement and the provision of informal learning. This approach promotes personal, social and emotional development whilst raising aspirations through the achievement of positive outcomes.

In 2024, over 22% of the youth population regularly accessed youth service learning opportunities, ranking 2nd for reach across the region and 7th across Wales.



Young people directly influence the service and set the direction every year. As a result of their feedback, the service restructured to mandate all full-time staff to work a minimum of two evenings per week, which has led to an increase in the number of youth clubs from 4 to 9. As a result, young people are able to access support within a reasonable distance from wherever they live, and this has had a positive impact on levels of engagement

Vulnerable young people are well supported by the Youth Service to achieve above expected attendance, wellbeing and post 16 transition. Support for young people identified at risk of disengaging from their learning in school and college is effective, as demonstrated by all pupils supported remaining in their setting (661 pupils). Young people accessing the new EOTAS provision, delivered by the Youth Service, have shown significant improvements in their attendance, wellbeing, and attitude towards



learning. During the first term, there was an 80% improvement reported across six core areas, with an average attendance of 90% in the EOTAS (educated other than at school) provision compared to 82% in mainstream schools. Of the original cohort, 80% returned to their mainstream school on a full timetable. The 2 remaining learners were identified not suitable to return with 1 requiring an Individual Development Plan.

Support for Electively Home Educated learners is strong with 36 electively home educated young people accessing two social groups offering non-formal activities, designed to reduce social isolation and promote wellbeing. For many participants, these sessions serve as their only opportunity for social interaction with peers. All 16-year-olds transitioned successfully into Post 16 provision.

The Positive Futures Programme is successful at preventing permanent exclusions, with no young people who accessed this provision being excluded in the year to date.

Engagement with Welsh language youth provision has increased by 60% (160 young people compared to 30 young people the previous year).

The Youth Service leads on implementing the Welsh Government's Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (YEPF) and this is supported by the strategic multi-agency Raising Aspirations Group and implementation of the Early Identification Tool, providing prevention and support for young people at risk of becoming or currently NEET and or homeless.

The early identification and support for young people at risk of becoming NEET or homeless from as early as year 2 has proven highly effective. This approach has led to a consistent reduction in the number of young people becoming NEET, with the rate decreasing to 2.1% in 2024, which is below the Wales average of 2.4% and an improvement from the previous year's rate of 2.5%. The approach to this is well embedded and the levels have been consistently low for over 10 years, surpassing expected outcomes for the area. As part of this approach, young people are supported well in their transition from school to Post 16 and these transitions are sustained in most cases.

Participation is a strength within the Local Authority, and many young people are able to express their views and influence issues that affect them.

The organisation has embedded 'The Right Way' approach into its integrated Impact assessments (IIA), ensuring that Children's Rights are a core consideration in all service changes, budget decisions, and new initiatives.

In September 2024 the participation function transferred from the corporate policy team to the Youth Service. It had been identified that the reach needed to broaden to include more young people with diverse needs. The move has enabled a more integrated approach to increasing youth participation across Education and the Council.

The Gypsy Roma Traveller Community Education Service

The Gypsy, Roma Traveller (GRT) Service comprises of a family liaison officer and a commissioned education support teacher. The service continues to provide one to one, and small group support. The service supports children and young people academically both within lessons and through withdrawal, and this support is suitably targeted for each individual pupil. These specific lessons are reviewed within meetings between the schools designated staff and the GRT Team. During meetings, assessment data and other areas of the child/young person's education, such as attendance and exclusions is reviewed.



The focus of the literacy intervention is to identify through baseline assessment and support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller learners who are underachieving in reading and spelling. The service aims to improve literacy outcomes through tailored one-to-one or small group support, with regular assessment to monitor progress. The impact of the literacy intervention has been very positive, with clear evidence of progress in both reading and spelling. 94% of supported learners showed improvement in reading, and more than half improved in spelling. Four pupils have exceeded expected outcomes. These results demonstrate the effectiveness of the intervention, and the importance of continued targeted support to ensure sustained progress.

Attendance for Gypsy and Traveller pupils has risen to 74.52% this academic year, compared to 73.15% last year — a sign of steady progress. This increase reflects the impact of continued monitoring and targeted interventions through a collaborative approach with families and the education welfare service.

A GRT Padlet has been developed to provide schools and practitioners with easy access to resources focused on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture. This online tool contains policies, training, referral criteria and signposts to professional learning. The aim is to raise awareness, promote understanding, and support more inclusive learning environments. Feedback on the Padlet has been very positive, with practitioners reporting increased confidence and engagement when working with GRT learners.

Economic Growth

Strategic employment sites and growth

Significant progress has been made, working collaboratively with Welsh and UK governments to attract and secure major employers to the area. The recent completion of the Heads of the Valley Road improvement, has provided a catalyst to secure the northern part of the county borough as a growth area. Further development work has taken place to firmly establish the area as a cluster growth area for job creation. Working in partnership with WG, planning permission was obtained on a strategic site and an investment proposal is being developed with a potential glass recycling employer

High Value Engineering (HiVE) Site (Hi-Tech Post 16 Education Facility)

Construction on the HiVE site in Ebbw Vale was on target to be completed by October 2024, however in September 2024 the developer, ISG, went into administration which impacted the delivery timeline and had financial implications. Owing to this, the site came back under the management of the council. In January 2025, following financial support from Tech Valleys, the council BESL (CMB) was awarded the contract to complete the works. The project is now complete and ready to welcome students in September [2025](#).



As part of HiVE a series of expansion programmes were undertaken during 2024- 2025. As part of this the Welsh Education Minister Jack Sheppard visited Ebbw Fawr Learning Community Secondary Phase to view the Hi- Tech equipment on offer and engage with local students.



In response to an increase in demand for hybrid working space the Council launched Goldworks in October 2024 providing workspace options, business support services, hot-desking, private offices, and meeting rooms equipped for freelancers, startups, and local businesses. The facility also serves as a venue for business support events and local networking meetings.



Blaenau Gwent Council – STEM Facilitation Project

The Blaenau Gwent STEM Facilitation Project connects local schools with businesses to inspire students and prepare them for future STEM careers. Launched in 2021 and initially piloted in the Ebbw Fawr school cluster, its success led to full rollout across Blaenau Gwent. The project supports ‘industry in schools’ programmes, helping students gain real-world insights and skills aligned with workplace needs. Following additional funding, the project has been extended and will now run until 2028.

QuickStart

The QuickStart Programme, supported by the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF), offers six-month paid work placements within Blaenau Gwent for unemployed individuals aged 16 and over. The initiative is designed to provide participants with meaningful work experience and the opportunity to develop key employability skills, thereby enhancing their prospects of securing sustained employment.

For 2024/25:

- 55 new participants enrolled to develop employability skills;
- 27 started a 6-month work placement;
- 25 received ongoing support on placement from 2023/24;
- Placements offered through 45 employers;
- 9 progressed onto an Apprenticeship; and
- 10 have remained employed 12 months after starting their placement (data is still being collected due to timescale of programme).

Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF)

The SPF Funding programme is being used to support the delivery of a number of key projects across the Council. These include support for communities, towns, community groups (through GAVO), business and SME support and the Employment and Skills Programme, working with both internal departments and partner organisations to deliver projects which were previously supported through ESF and other EU funding programmes. The total funding for Blaenau Gwent over the past 3 years including £603, 816 administration is £27,847,691 some of the key projects supported through SPF include; the refurbishment of Brynmawr Tennis Courts, Garnlydan and Glyncoed playgrounds. The funding has also been used to fund our community safety wardens, helping our residents to feel safe.

Priority	Allocation over 3-year period 2022- 2025
People and Skills	£9,172,303
Supporting Local Businesses	£7,529,504
Community and Place	£7,284,373
Multiply	£3,257,695

A transition year of funding has been approved for 2025-26 with a reduced budget and work is ongoing to understand what future funding will be available from the UK Government post March 2026.



Planning & sustainable development within our communities

Local Development Plan (LDP)

Work has continued to progress the Council's new local development plan and is scheduled to progress further during 25/26. The LDP provides the spatial framework for the Council over the next 10 years and is a key ingredient that unlocks the Council's economic and place-based objectives.

Placemaking

The following activity has taken place:

- Ebbw Vale - work continues with the development of the delivery plan. This has included exploring options for key sites and engagement with stakeholders. Future engagement will be undertaken with Design Commission for Wales;
- Brynmawr - the placemaking plan has been approved by Scrutiny and Cabinet and now work is underway on the development of the delivery plan. Several projects have been completed in recent years including development of the former NMC factory site.;
- Tredegar - The delivery plan contains the proposed list of projects to achieve the overall vision for the town. Some projects are already underway and expected to be completed in 2025. These include the Grade 2 listed Former Tredegar Town Hall and the walkway;
- Abertillery – Following the approval of the Placemaking plan, work has commenced on the delivery of short-term projects within the plan, including the pedestrianisation of Somerset Street (for outdoor dining), creation of public space at Jubilee Square, improvement works to Abertillery Arcade and completion of new Abertillery Library (in former Trinity Chapel); and
- Funding has been identified for the development of a Blaina Placemaking Plan and a tender process to secure the support for the plan's development will be undertaken in 2025/26.

Council Property and assets

The Council will continue with its plans to maximise efficiencies in the use of its remaining corporate assets - the General Office, the Energy Centre, ViTCC and Blaina ICC - and to develop its hybrid working model, supporting the Medium-Term Financial Plan and Workforce Strategy, focussing on:

- The Council's Workforce Strategy;
- Current and future demands for service-based and agile-working staff across the Council;
- The need for hybrid meeting technology for day-to-day activities; and
- The needs of customers & Members.

The Industrial portfolio of 16 industrial estates comprising 191 lettable units, is jointly managed by the Business and Innovation Team within Regeneration and the Estates and the teams continue to work closely with Technical Services to improve the assets and increase occupation, estimated at 95% occupation and accommodating many SME's and about 800 jobs in total.

The Council is developing a Property Strategy which will seek to align property decision making with the Council's key strategies and objectives and to set performance targets that will be monitored annually through the Asset Management Plan

A Corporate Property and Asset Management Group has been established to discuss accommodation needs, building status and potentials for cost savings. Our focus is upon enabling the community to use and manage wherever possible, community-based buildings. Officers have made great progress in moving from our many short-term leases or tenancies to longer term leases as well as optimising the use of Community Asset Transfers (CATs Progress on the CATs include:



Completed CATs (in the last two years)	Close to Completion	New CATs Being Processed
- Rassau Resource Centre – lease to Rassau Resource Community Centre CIC. - Beaufort Welfare - upper Changing Room & Rugby Pitch. Lease to Beaufort RFC Fields and Facilities Ltd.. - Roseheyworth Field – changing rooms and pitches. Lease to Tyleryan Belles Sports Association Limited. - Cwm Community Allotments – lease to Barefoot Farm CIC Blaina Institute - Blaina Community Institute.	- Beaufort Colts AFC Fields & Facilities Ltd - Hilltop Fields Pavilion - Beaufort Welfare – lower Changing Room & Football Pitch. Lease to be assigned to Glyn Ebbw Fields & Training Facilities Ltd.	- Wetland area at Jim Owen Pavilion, Cwmtillery - Windsor Road Field - Six Bells Tennis - Brynithel Recreation Ground - Coedcae Scout Hall – - Brynmaur Welfare – football pitch, pavilion and bowling green -

Actions and priorities for 2025/26

The recently approved federated council model brings a unique opportunity to reframe our economy and place vision and priorities for both Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen. Work has already commenced to develop an overarching “Blueprint for Growth” strategy that aims to maximise investment opportunities, built upon the local distinctiveness of both areas and its strategic location within the region, whilst simultaneously building and sustaining vibrant communities through our placemaking programme.

This strategy will also provide the framework to establish future areas of work and priorities to ensure we make the biggest impact, whilst operating firmly within our financial and staff resources.

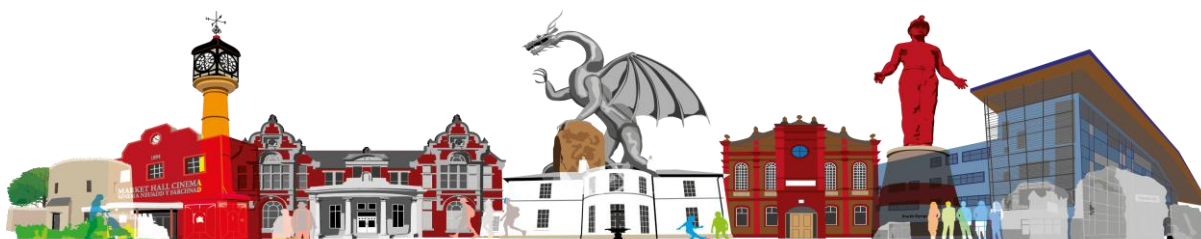
Key priorities

1. Develop and agree Blueprint for Growth
2. Establish work programmes and outcomes under the four pillars of – Investment, Placemaking, Planning and Property.
3. Develop an appropriate staff structure to deliver the Blueprint for Growth across both councils.



Key Challenges Identified for Action in 2025/26

- Schools are producing deficit reduction plans over the short to medium term which will identify financial efficiencies and the impact of those efficiencies. This will be reported as part of next self-assessment
- There has been an increase in the number of electively home-educated (EHE) children within Blaenau Gwent over the past few years. This needs to be monitored closely going forward to ensure that the number of visits increase in line with the figures, this is monitored as part of our performance indicators.
- Continue to support the one school in a category, The River Centre.
- Provide enhanced support to Children Looked After owing to the increase in both the number of exclusions and days lost.
- In 2024 all Key Stage 4 examination indicators declined when compared to 2023, as it did across Wales, no school performed above the family average in relation to the 5A* - A measure. This will be a key priority for the Council during 2025/26.
- The Council is developing a Property Strategy which will seek to align property decision making with the Council's key strategies and objectives and to set performance targets that will be monitored annually through the Asset Management Plan. It is anticipated that the Strategy and Plan will be presented to Scrutiny Committee in the Autumn 2025.



Performance Indicator	Data						
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	Performance
% of Pupils entitled to Free Schools Meals (eFSM) BG	25.5	31.4	33.3	24.6	24.1	23.2	N/A
% Attendance – Primary	N/A	89.9%	89.0%	90.4%	91.4%	92.1%	Improving
% Attendance – Secondary <i>(Higher Figure is Better)</i>		84.8%	84.8%	85.8%	86.8%	89.6%	Improving
Number of Pupils being Electively Home Educated in BG <i>(Lower Figure is Better)</i>	70	89	132	137	193	218	Declining
Number of Schools in the category of Causing Concern (out of a total of 25) <i>Target is 0</i>	4	2	2	2	1	2	Declining
Number and % of young people that are NEET leaving year 11 *Data gathered June and verification in October <i>(Lower Figure is Better)</i>	Not captured due to Covid	9 1.5%	9 1.6%	31 5%	14 2.5%	14 2.1%	Maintaining
Aspire Internal Apprentices - LA Apprenticeships <i>(Higher Figure is Better)</i>	N/A	5	10	12	8	8	Maintaining
Aspire External Apprentices- Apprenticeship offered in industry <i>(Higher Figure is Better)</i>	13	9	8	17	16	15	Small decline
% Occupancy of Blaenau Gwent Industrial Units <i>(Higher Figure is Better)</i>	89%	88%	87%	85%	89%	86%	Declining

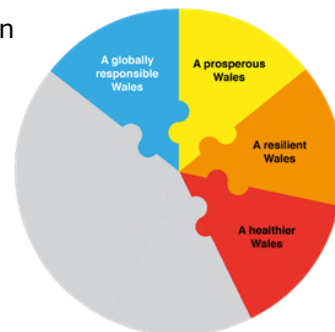


Well- being Objective 2

Respond to the nature and climate crisis and enable connected communities

Why This Is Important as an Area of Focus:

Blaenau Gwent has a rich heritage, and its buildings and countryside are what make it an attractive place to live, work and visit. The local environment should be used to help improve the health and well-being of families and communities and be enhanced for future generations to continue to enjoy. There is a real desire to see the communities where people live kept clean, tidy and useable, creating areas that people can be proud of.



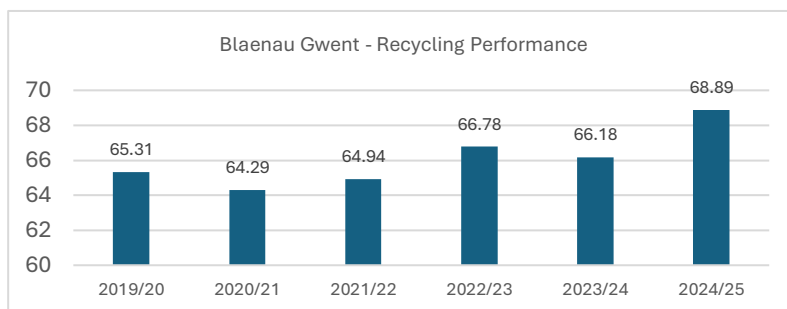
What We Aim to Achieve – For Blaenau Gwent Council to greatly reduce its carbon emissions, and provides an environment which supports growth and well-being and connects communities.

How well are we doing?

The following narrative provides an evaluative reflection of the activity, undertaken throughout 2024/25, across service areas that directly support this Well-being Objective. The narrative reflects what has gone well but also, and more importantly, where we are experiencing challenges. These challenges have then been collated together at the end of each section. These areas will be identified as areas of focus moving forward and will be reported as part of our next Self-Assessment, as well as performance monitoring throughout the year.

Reducing waste and increasing recycling

Between 2019/20 to 2023/24, Blaenau Gwent exceeded the Welsh Government statutory recycling target of 64%, achieving:



For 2024/25, recycling performance increased to 68.89%. Although performance has increased, Blaenau Gwent has fallen short of the Welsh Government target of 70% for 2024/ 25. Work is continuing to reduce the amount of residual (black bag) waste being collected and increasing recycling participation across the Borough.

For Blaenau Gwent to achieve the 70% recycling target, the council would have needed to reduce residual waste and increase recycling by 376 tonnes. For every 1% increase there would be a need to divert 339.11 tonnes from the residual tonnages to reuse/recycling and composting tonnages. This is made more difficult by things like smaller gardens in the area overall, so green waste figures are generally lower than other areas. It is imperative that the Council maintains and improves its recycling targets as there is a potential financial penalty imposed by Welsh Government if these are not met.



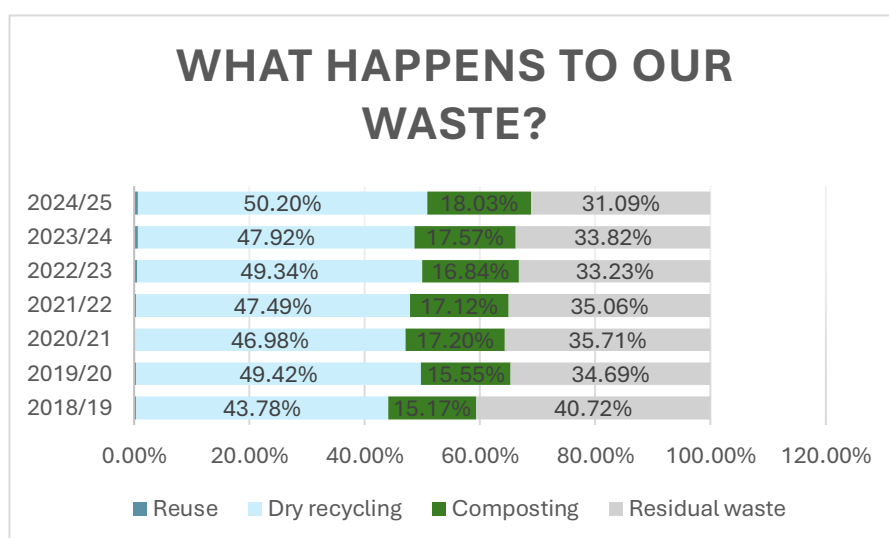
If a fine is imposed on the Council, this would equate to £200 for every tonne below the target. Therefore, if the current recycling rate of 68.89% with a shortfall of 376 tonnes would equate to a fine of £75,200

We are currently working with Welsh Government, through Local Partnerships and Wrap, to develop a new Waste Strategy which will set out the challenges we face and the strategic actions we will need to take to increase our recycling rate to 70% and beyond and reduce our overall waste.

Breakdown of 2024/25 Performance		
	2023/24	2024/25
Quarter 1 (April – June)	70.11%	69.83%
Quarter 2 (July – Sept)	66.99%	69.27%
Quarter 3 (Oct – Dec)	61.91%	68.40%
Quarter 4 (Jan – March)	65.42%	68.03%
Annual (not yet verified by Natural Resources Wales)	66.18%	68.89%

When looking at the breakdown of tonnage figures for 2024/25, compared to 2023/24, it shows residual waste, food waste, kerbside dry recycling, garden waste, HWRC waste and commercial waste have all increased.

- Residual waste has increased by 315.591 tonnes (2.51%)
- Food waste has increased by 98.67 tonnes (2.67%)
- Kerbside dry recycling has increased by 86.334 tonnes (1.52%)
- Garden waste has increased by 37.981 tonnes (2.49%)
- HWRC waste has increased by 279.052 tonnes (4.67%)
- Commercial waste has increased by 1221.496 tonnes (40.71%)



**Quarter 4 indicators not yet signed off by NRW, but figures unlikely to change.*

The statutory recycling rate in Wales was increased to 70% in 2024/25, whilst the Council has made great improvements in our recycling rate, early indications of performance are that the Council will not achieve this target. Officers have engaged with Welsh Government, through Local Partnerships and Wrap, to develop a new Waste and Recycling Strategy which details the future vision for the service and actions required to achieve and go beyond 70%. The next stage is for public consultation in 2025.

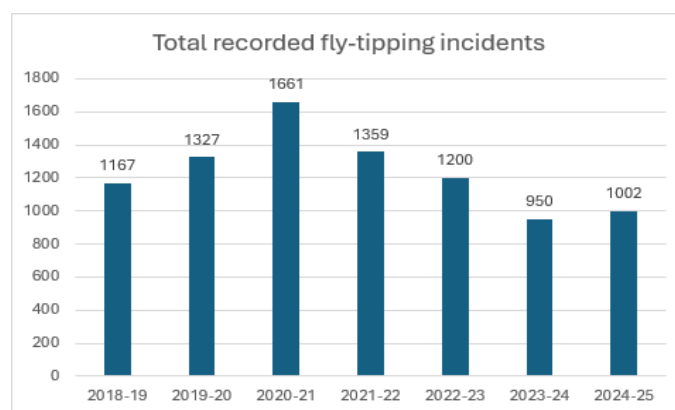


Fly Tipping and Street Cleansing

Deployment of CCTV units across Blaenau Gwent continues to target highway lay-bys and rural locations subject to prolific fly tipping. Blaenau Gwent issued 110 £400 fly tipping fixed penalty notices (FPN) for 23/24 and there has been a slight reduction this year with 109 £400 fly tipping FPN's issued between April 2024 to March 2025.

2024/2025	Number recorded
Number of Fly tipping incidents	1002
No of Litter Fixed penalty notices issued	412
No of Dog Control fixed penalty notices issued	20
Commercial Duty of care	22
Household Duty of Care	8

During the year 2024/25, a total of 22 £300 Commercial duty of care FPNs were issued to businesses who did not have appropriate waste disposal arrangements in place while 8 householders received £300 fixed penalty notices for failing to check their waste was transferred to an authorised waste carrier. 4 individuals were prosecuted for various waste offences which resulted in £5,913 being issued in fines and costs by the Courts



Housing and Energy

The delivery of ECO4Flex (a scheme to identify domestic properties in need of energy improvement measures) in Blaenau Gwent, through the Cardiff Capital Region (CCR) partnership, has brought both benefits and limitations. While the CCR model provides a structured regional approach and access to delivery partners such as EDF and Citi Energy, local uptake has remained low. Households benefiting from energy measures fell from 32 in 2023/24 to just 5 in 2024/25, despite the framework being in place. In response to this decline, a targeted campaign was launched in March 2025, with Citi Energy reaching out to approximately 6,600 properties rated EPC E, F, or G via direct mail, supported by social media promotion. However, the campaign generated only four leads, highlighting the difficulty in converting awareness into action. This outcome suggests that the CCR model, while consistent, may lack the flexibility to fully address local delivery challenges. To improve responsiveness and engagement, the Council is now exploring complementary delivery routes to increase ECO4Flex uptake across the borough.

Local Area Energy Plan (LEAP)- whole energy system, looking at energy from the Domestic, Industrial, Commercial, Public, Agriculture and Transport Sector

During 2024/25 a Local Area Energy Plan (LEAP) was produced with funding from Welsh Government. The LEAP outlines what a Net Zero carbon energy system could look like in 2050 for Blaenau Gwent. The LEAP sets out the scale of the transformation required to switch to an energy system based largely on renewable electricity. The LEAP identifies actions for a range of organisations and the council committed to taking forward some of the actions identified and supporting, in principle, those that will require additional funding.

The Council continues to investigate opportunities for low and zero carbon procurement within the corporate landlord portfolio, including:

- New PV installations at Willowtown Primary, Rhos Y fedwen Primary School, Abertillery Leisure Centre and Ebbw Vale Sports Centre;
- Installing low carbon technologies, including LED replacements, at Coed y Garn Primary School, St Mary's Church in Wales Primary School and Georgetown Primary School; and
- Installing new low/zero carbon technologies in new builds and large refurbishment works at the new Glyncoed Primary School, Trinity Chapel, the Old Abertillery Library, and the new Welsh Medium Primary School.



Work around developing Energy Projects continues with progress being made on the Silent Valley Wind Turbine. This now has planning permission and will be progressed to procurement when the case for investment is re-determined. Work is continuing on the development and installation of infrastructure for Blaenau Gwent fleet, schools and Council buildings.

Biodiversity

All Councils in Wales are under a legal duty via the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 to seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity and promote the resilience of ecosystems.

In September 2024, the Council formally declared a nature emergency in recognition of the significant threat posed by declining biodiversity within the borough. To address this issue and safeguard local biodiversity for the future, the Council adopted a Local Nature Recovery Action [Plan](#) which aims to reduce or prevent further loss of natural habitats.

The plan has 6 key objectives:

- **Objective 1:** Engage and support participation and understanding to embed biodiversity throughout decision making at all levels;
- **Objective 2:** Safeguard species and habitats of principal importance and improve their management;
- **Objective 3:** Increase the resilience of our natural environment by restoring degraded habitats and habitat creation;
- **Objective 4:** Tackle key pressures on species and habitats;
- **Objective 5:** Improve our evidence, understanding and monitoring; and
- **Objective 6:** Put in place a framework of governance and support for delivery.

The Council has been working in partnership to implement the actions set out in the plan and has made some progress including designating over 140 sites of significant value for nature conservation to ensure they are and will be protected through local and national policies.

A Pollinator [Policy](#) has also been produced and endorsed by the Council in 2024 to promote the creation of pollinator friendly habitats on land owned by the Council, the policy outlines several actions which includes; reducing the number of cuts to grassed areas to allow a longer growing period, introducing perennial native wildflower mix to formal beds and where appropriate to other urban area green spaces continue to develop more habitats for solitary bees e.g. bee bank, grasses, tree holes and bug hotels.

Storm Bert

In November 2024 Storm Bert brought devastation across South Wales, and many communities in Blaenau Gwent were deeply affected. The extreme weather experienced exceeded all predictions, with record-breaking rainfall in some areas of our borough. This was an extraordinary challenge for the Council, emergency services, and communities.

The Council's immediate priority was to safeguard the lives of residents, protect properties where possible, and preserve critical infrastructure. Despite planning and preparations, based on the forecasts available, the intensity and impact of the storm went beyond anything anticipated. Homes, businesses, schools, roads, and childcare facilities were all affected. The volume of emergency calls received were unprecedented.

The Storm also triggered a landslide in Cwmtillery causing significant disruption and distress. As we look to the future, we know that events like these are becoming more frequent due to climate change. Building resilience within our communities will be critical, and we will work closely with partners to ensure we are better prepared for the challenges ahead. A full debrief and review of the Councils response was conducted, and an independent review was also undertaken. From this, a members working group has been established in order to address lessons learnt and prepare for any future extreme weather.



Public Transport

Works are now complete on the frequency enhancement project on the Ebbw Vale line delivered in partnership with the Welsh Government, Transport for Wales and Network Rail. There are now direct services between Ebbw Vale and Newport and Cardiff, with 2 trains per hour from Ebbw Vale. The project has also seen a fully accessible Access for All footbridge, a new platform and car park at Llanhilleth. To allow the new services to run, a new 7-mile passing loop has been built between Crosskeys and Aberbeeg alongside new earthworks and drainage, constructed to accommodate the new track improving connectivity and access for residents and businesses with the wider region and beyond.

Highways

The completion and formal adoption of the Highway Asset Management [Plan](#) (HAMP) was approved by Council in September 2023. The HAMP will support and drive the Authority's approach to highways maintenance over the next 5 years.

A new banding method for sealing patches / potholes across the highway network has been used with the aim of making the finish look more aesthetically pleasing, but more importantly, prolong the life of the repaired highway and prevent multiple visits. Additionally, the council is in the process of trialling a new method for patching and pothole works using a JCB Bobcat which is proving to be very positive.

Going forward the council has secured funding from Welsh Government through their Local Government Borrowing Initiative (LGBI) for 2025/26 and 2026/27 where it is envisaged this will make a major impact on the maintenance of the highway infrastructure.

Key Challenges Identified for Action in 2025/26

- In order to improve the take up of energy improvement measures across homes, the Council is exploring complementary delivery routes to increase ECO4Flex uptake across the borough.
- Building resilience within our communities with regards to climate events will be critical, and we will work closely with partners to ensure we are better prepared for the challenges ahead by implementing our flood management action plan.
- Continue to work to achieve the Welsh Government recycling target of 70% which is included as part of our performance indicators. Officers have engaged with Welsh Government, through Local Partnerships and WRAP, to develop a new Waste and Recycling Strategy which details the future vision for the service and further actions required
 - *Next steps – consult public during 25/ 26 on the Council's new Waste and Recycling Strategy*
- Implementation of the new Local Nature Recovery Action Plan and Pollinator Policy to respond to the nature emergency.



Performance Indicator	Data						
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	Performance
The percentage of municipal waste collected by local authorities sent to landfill Target - 2% (Lower Figure is Better)	0.3	0.6	1.3	0.31	0.17	0.29 (unverified figure)	Declined but above Target
The percentage of municipal waste incinerated with energy recovery Target 45% (Lower Figure is Better)	44.3	46.7	45.2	44.20	44.0	41.9 (unverified figure)	Improving
Amount invested into active travel routes (£) (Higher figure is Better)	-	234,000	295,000	766,154.73	756,296.62	968,989.40	Improving
Average % of planning applications determined on time (cumulative average over a year) Target 95% Higher Figure is Better	-	96%	91%	93%	95%	98%	Improving
% of procurements that consider Social and Well-being objectives (including Decarbonisation and Foundation Economy etc.) Target 100% (Higher Figure is Better)	-	-	-	70	100	100	Maintaining

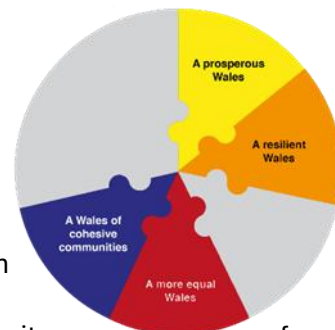


Well-being Objective 3

Empowering and supporting communities to be safe, independent and resilient

Why This Is Important as an Area of Focus - The Council wants to encourage and support people to make healthy lifestyle choices to enable children, young people and families to thrive. Research has proven people demonstrating positive health behaviours from birth throughout their life will lead to greater independence, and people being free from complicated health conditions later in life. This in turn could reduce demand on services and ensure the services that are provided are high quality, efficient and responsive to local people's needs. With reduced funding and increasing demand on services the Council can no longer do everything it has done in the past. The focus must be on those actions that will have the greatest impact.

Safeguarding the most vulnerable people in the community continues to be a top priority for the Council alongside transforming the aspirations of residents and valuing fairness and equality in everything we do.



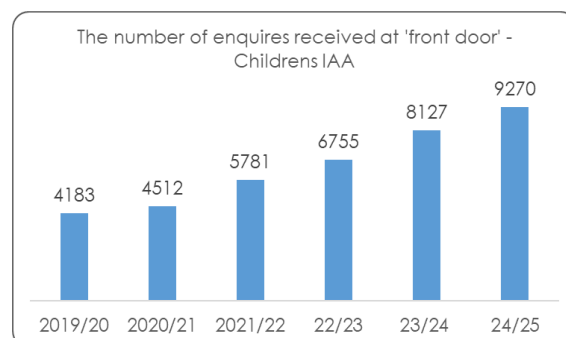
What We Aim to Achieve - An increase in the resilience of communities, where everyone is welcome and safe and which minimises dependency and maximises independence.

How well are we doing?

The following narrative provides an evaluative reflection of the activity, undertaken throughout 2024/25, across service areas that directly support this Well-being Objective. The narrative reflects what has gone well but also, and more importantly, where we are experiencing challenges. These challenges have then been collated together at the end of each section. These areas will be identified as areas of focus moving forward and will be reported as part of our next Self-Assessment, as well as performance monitoring throughout the year.

Information Advice and Assistance

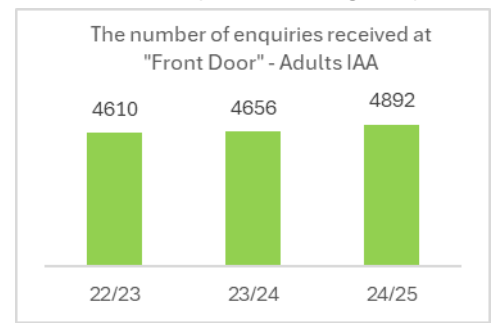
The Social Services Directorate continues to have dedicated Information Advice and Assistance (IAA) Teams for both Children and Adult Social Services working as the first point of contact for the public who wish to access advice and support. The teams take a preventative and strength based approach to ensure needs are met at the earliest opportunity, by providing the right services to prevent needs from escalating.



Referrals into Children's Services IAA continues to increase. The numbers during 2024/25 are significantly higher with an increase of 1,143 (14.1%) compared to 2023/24. Of the 9,270 referrals during 2024/25, 566 (6.1%) were referred to preventative services (Families First), compared to 8,127 referrals in 2023/24, with 711 (8.7%) of referrals to Families First.



Referrals into Adults Services IAA data collation was revised in August 2021; therefore, data is only comparable to two previous years and demonstrates a small increase in contacts. Of the 4,892 enquiries during the year, 2,478 (51%) were resolved at referral and did not require a comprehensive assessment by the long-term teams. In comparison, of the 4,656 received during 2023/24, 2,506 (54%) were resolved within the IAA team.



A review was conducted in 2023/24 to assess how we can enhance support for children and families in Blaenau Gwent through preventative measures. Based on the recommendations from this review, service managers are exploring opportunities for greater collaboration between the Family Information Service, Flying Start, and Families First. This initiative includes the development of a single point-of-access family support hub, which is scheduled to become operational by the end of 2025. The hub aims to ensure families are easily able to access the information they need.

Safeguarding

The council is committed to creating an environment which enables people to maximise their independence, develop solutions and take an active role in their communities whilst feeling safe and protected. We believe that all children, adults and young people have the right to be safe from harm, and it is a corporate objective to put effective safeguarding arrangements in place to protect people from harm.

The Council recognises its responsibilities in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, young people and adults at risk, and this includes the contribution we make to working together with other agencies so that all children and young people reach their full potential and we continue to look after the most vulnerable people in our communities.

Monitoring and reporting systems are well-developed to ensure the department is able to track information and evidence that the safeguarding agenda remains a priority for the local authority. Performance information is collated to identify activity, demands and trends in order for service delivery and improvement to take place. This includes a number of items that are statutory requirements as part of the Welsh Government Performance Framework.

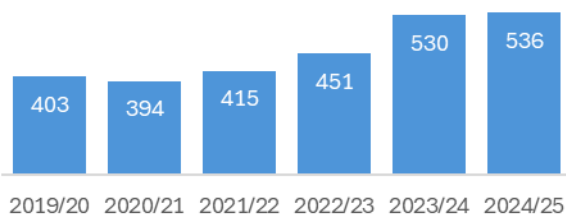
Safeguarding reports are submitted annually through the council's democratic process and are categorised separately for Adult Services, Children's Services, and Education. These reports are presented to ensure transparency, maintain accountability, and provide oversight of safeguarding practices across all service areas, allowing the council to monitor progress, address concerns, and uphold the highest standards of care and protection for individuals at risk. The most recent safeguarding reports can be found here:

- Education Safeguarding Annual Performance [Report](#)
- Children's Social Services Safeguarding Annual Performance [Report](#)
- Adult Social Services Safeguarding Annual Performance [Report](#)

Overall, the data shows a slight increase in referrals of adults at risk in 2024/25 (**834**) compared to 2023/24 (**803**) – 3.8%. This may be reflective of there being more adults at risk due to increased poverty with regards to the cost-of-living crisis affecting all local communities. The increase could also be due to the national and regional media awareness raising. People are becoming more aware of their rights and the importance of reporting any concerns. The actual number of adults has risen slightly from 530 to 536.



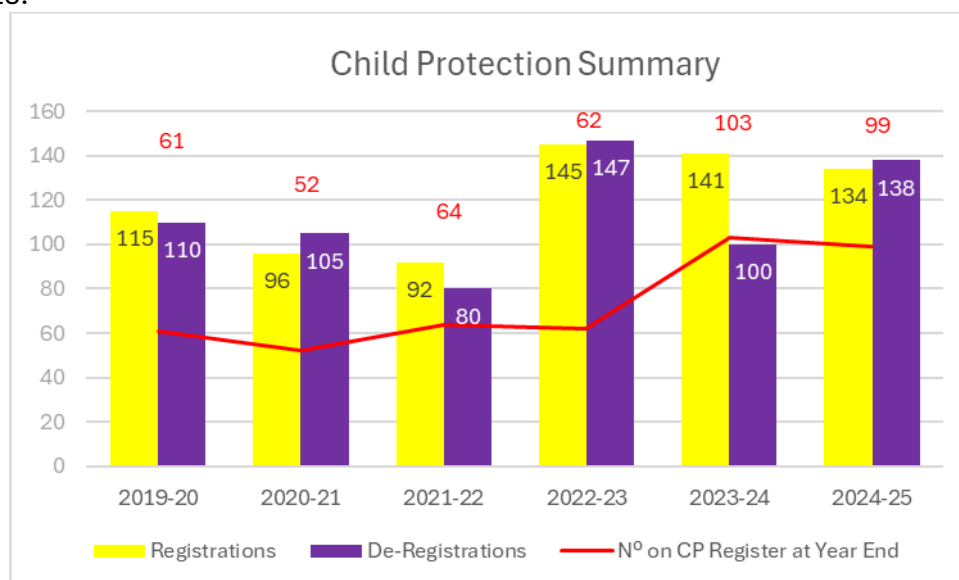
Number of adults suspected of being at risk of abuse or neglect reported



The Safeguarding Board earlier this year focused on the impact of poverty on the most vulnerable. The increase could also be due to awareness raising through the regular Safeguarding training that we deliver jointly with Caerphilly safeguarding team. Child Protection reports identified that 98.72% of Initial Child Protection Conferences were held in timescales. In 2025 there were 99 children on the Child Protection register in comparison to 103 children as at the end of 2023/24.

The Council has continued to see an increase in adult safeguarding referrals as shown in the graph above. This increase is potentially attributed to increased awareness raising and enhanced safeguarding training delivered jointly with Caerphilly safeguarding team

As at the end of 2024 there were 99 children on the Child Protection register in comparison to 103 children as at the end of 2023.



The total number of visits to children on the child protection register that were completed within statutory timescale:

- 2024/25 – 2,043 (87.0%)
- 2023/24 – 1,270 (66.2%)

138 children were removed from the child protection register during the year. Of those the average number of days they were registered is 231.9 days.

There are 201 Children Looked After (CLA) compared to 203 at the end of previous year. The rate of admissions into care has continued to drop this year with 55 children in 2023/24 and 53 this year.

The Wales Safeguarding Procedures for children and adults at risk of abuse and neglect details the essential roles and responsibilities for practitioners to ensure that they safeguard children and adults who are at risk. The Procedures help practitioners apply the legislation in the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 and statutory safeguarding guidance, [Working Together to Safeguard People](#).



The 2024 Independent Reviewing Officer annual report provides clear evidence of how the safeguarding teams within Blaenau Gwent Children's Services met their responsibilities throughout 2024. As part of this report an action plan was developed which set out seventeen service aims for the year, these actions included:

- Ensuring full-service delivery and staff levels were maintained;
- Reporting to the senior management team quarterly relating to child protection and disruptions of placements;
- Providing both internal and external safeguarding training;
- Being proactively involved in delivery the further development of the outcome focussed approach;
- Full participation in the Public Law Action Plan and the CIW rapid review;
- Attendance at multi agency meetings specifically in relation to safeguarding i.e. multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA); and
- Undertaking internal audits/updating and developing policies and procedures.

All aims were met except for one ongoing internal audit and the goal of strengthening team resilience around participation and attendance—an area that could not be addressed due to reliance on another coordinator and lack of training for partner agencies.

Looking ahead to 2025, the safeguarding team will contribute fully to the Practice Development Action Plan, building on the findings from completed audits. The team will also develop a new framework for ongoing audits and update service delivery processes across several safeguarding areas. The top priority remains maintaining complete and effective service delivery.

Residential Home

Through the Welsh Government Radical Reform Grant, the Council was provided with money to purchase two detached 5-bedroom houses, at a cost of approximately £900,000, along with a further £700,000 for refurbishment costs. These will be providing safe, high-quality care for our local children to remain within the Borough. Since opening, the home has successfully welcomed its first young person, and the team has worked hard to establish a nurturing, trauma-informed environment that promotes stability and emotional safety. Although still in its early stages, Mons Calpe is already demonstrating positive outcomes, with strong multi-agency collaboration and a committed staff team in place. We're proud of the progress so far and excited about the potential impact moving forward

Working in Partnership

Effective collaboration and partnership working assists us in identifying existing needs and shape and commission future sustainable services.

The Social Care and Housing Support Team continues the joint working with attendance and participation in Gwent wide Regional Commissioners meetings; Care Home and Domiciliary Care Forums/Meetings, Regional Housing Support Collaborative Group; and national webinars /meetings with Care Inspectorate Wales and Social Care Wales. The Team has also recently refreshed the joint (with Caerphilly County Borough Council) Domiciliary Care Framework.

The Safeguarding Team is working in partnership with the other Gwent Safeguarding Teams and the Gwent Regional Safeguarding Business Unit in promoting and delivering the new Safeguarding Training Framework introduced by Social Care Wales.

The Community Options Team is working in partnership with Torfaen Council, who are leading on a feasibility study focussed on supported employment models for people with learning disabilities and/or neurodivergence in Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen.



The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, effective from April 2016, places a statutory obligation on local authorities to adopt a preventative approach in meeting individuals' care and support needs, which includes minimising the impact of impairments. Rehabilitation services for those with sensory impairment offer short-term, specialist assessment and support to people with visual impairment and/or dual sensory loss who are eligible and would benefit from a period of focused rehabilitation.

The Rehabilitation Officer for Visually Impaired (ROVI) plays a critical role in enhancing service users' confidence, providing emotional support, facilitating the recovery and development of life skills, promoting independence and informed choice, and assessing requirements for specialized equipment and adaptations. In recent years, there has been a decline in the number of vision rehabilitation officers in Wales, and recruitment for such positions in Blaenau Gwent has been challenging. During this period, Caerphilly County Borough Council supported and advised IAA staff in assisting individuals with visual impairment and collaborated closely with service users to design and implement individualized rehabilitation training programmes.

A Gwent Regional Partnership Board (RPB) is in operation, fulfilling local authority statutory duties required under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014. The Act places a statutory duty on local authorities and health boards to prepare a Regional Area Plan, following the publication of the region's Population Needs Assessment (PNA) and Market Stability Report (MSR).

The Gwent PNA was previously approved by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, during Autumn 2022. The Area Plan highlights the commitment to work in partnership to improve the health and wellbeing across the population of Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen. Given current challenges and financial pressures, it is paramount to work together to deliver joint solutions, to shared priorities, and avoid duplication.

Following the publication of the regional Population Needs Assessment (PNA) report, each local authority and health board are required to prepare and publish an Area Plan setting out the range and level of services they propose to provide in response to the PNA core themes, which are:

- Children, Young People and Families;
- Adults, including People living with a Dementia;
- Health & Physical Disabilities including Sensory Loss & Impairment;
- Mental Health and Learning Disabilities;
- Autism and Neurodevelopmental Conditions; and
- Unpaid Carers.

The Gwent Area Plan 2023-2028 has been signed off by the Gwent Regional Partnership Board and an Area Plan summary has also been included. The plan has been developed in partnership with Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen local authorities, and Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, Third Sector partners and the Regional Partnership Team and their commitment to the Marmot principles. The Area

Plan sets out the actions required to achieve the priorities identified in the PNA, by our partners and citizens, and closely aligns to the Public Service Board (PSB) and Well-being Plan. The Area Plan is reviewed annually and can be updated to ensure we are meeting the needs of our communities. The progress against delivery of key objectives in the Area Plan, is monitored through the RPB Annual Report which considers specifically the priority groups set out in the PNA and cross cutting themes.

The work of the Regional Partnership Board (RPB) supports the delivery of integrated responsive care and support across the region. However, there is still a great deal of work to do to ensure the Area Action Plan, developed by the RPB, translates into meeting the needs of local citizens. The vehicle for Blaenau Gwent to make this happen is the Integrated Services Partnership Board (ISPB). This board has set a small number of



priorities based on the those outlined in the Area Plan. A number of task and finish groups have been set up to progress these priorities. An example is the campaign to increase breast feeding rates in Blaenau Gwent and improve the oral hygiene of children. Both areas have seen significant activity early in 2024, with the expectation that evidence will follow after 12 months of the difference that has been made

Breastfeeding campaign

In 2024 the Blaenau Gwent Flying Start Programme launched a new breastfeeding campaign to improve breastfeeding rates and provide support to new mothers across the borough. The programme is supported by a comprehensive action plan which includes several initiatives in collaboration with Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, Public Health Wales, local schools, colleges, businesses and the Voluntary Sector. These initiatives include training for peer counsellors, arranging support groups and providing educational resources.



In 2024 38.6% of mothers breastfed at first feed, following the launch of the campaign, in 2025 64% of mothers breastfed at First Feed.

	Breast feeding rates 2024	Breast feeding rates 2025
First Feed	38.6%	64%
10 days	34.18%	64%
After 6 weeks	24.7%	32.1%
After 6 months	19.6%	21.4%

Additional shared prosperity funding has been secured to enhance the current team by recruiting a Breastfeeding Support Worker to ensure there is a remained focus on Breastfeeding and that support and information continues for mothers. The campaign and action plan will be continued to be implemented and kept on focus for the year ahead, to embed sustainable change. To compliment the campaign an Early Years Nutrition pathway in collaboration with ABUHB Dietetics team which will be launched in 25/26 to focus on giving children the best start in life and reducing childhood obesity rates.

Workforce

Our workforce continues to be our greatest asset to ensure we deliver the best care and support available. Having a skilled and motivated workforce is essential in order to provide high quality services. As part of this, the Council has a Joint Workforce Development Team with Caerphilly County Borough Council with responsibility for delivering a training and development strategy that supports development opportunities for staff at all levels in Social Services.

Workforce stability is a key consideration within Social Services as some teams are facing staffing shortages, however, it is acknowledged that this is a Wales wide position and there is no simple solution. The department continues to look at innovative ways of managing the workload within teams as well as developing recruitment and retention strategies to address workforce pressures. Despite these significant pressures the existing staff and providers of services have continued to ensure children and adults needs are met, risks are managed, and safeguarding issues dealt with.

During 2024/25 we did however see a stabilisation of our workforce within Childcare Social Work teams. Turnover of staff still occurs; however, we have been able to fill these vacancies. Staffing levels in our provider services have also seen workforce stabilisation and a reduction in the use of agency staff. This has resulted in a reduction in staff sickness which no doubt has led to an improved consistency of care.



A number of posts within Social Services are supported via grant funding. There is a significant risk that this funding will come to an end within the next few years with referrals into Social Services increasing, there is a risk that lack of external funding will impact service delivery and sustainability moving forward. Workforce and capacity is a key risk area for Blaenau Gwent and is featured on the Corporate Risk Register which is monitored regularly by Joint Executive Team.

Benefits continue to be realised for and by the workforce through the scale of opportunity possible due to the joint workforce development service model hosted by Blaenau Gwent in partnership with Caerphilly.

When comparing the performance of the collaborative approach to other workforce development services in Gwent some key headlines from 2024/25 include:

- Supported 51% of all the internally sponsored Social Work students in Gwent (32);
- Supported 85% of all those that achieved the Social Service Practitioner award in Gwent (23);
- Delivered 46% of all the Newly Qualified Social Workers in Gwent (28); and
- Delivered 56% of all the learning opportunities offered in Gwent.

Dementia coordinators have been recruited on a fixed term basis through the Health and Social Care Regional Integration Fund (RIF) to support individuals who are experiencing issues with their memory. The coordinators support the family until individuals are referred to the Memory Assessment Service and formally diagnosed and improving their journey throughout the system.

This improves the flow of hospital discharge and ensures the voice of the individual and family is heard. There is a challenge of sustainability of the service due to posts being grant funded.

Children's Services

There has been a consistent gradual increase in costs of placements for children looked after with Independent Fostering Agencies and residential providers over the past few years. High costs, combined with increasing numbers of looked after children and complexity of their needs, places a significant strain on the council budget and available funding for other aspects of children's services.

Furthermore, sufficiency of fostering placements even with private providers is increasingly an issue leading to escalation of needs for children when a family environment fostering placement is not available and the only option remains a residential placement, which in fact is not justified by the level of child's needs. In some situations, children are placed unnecessarily out of county, away from their birth families, friends and communities leading to long term higher costings and poor outcomes for children looked after.

Even when children looked after are placed within their local area, accessing the necessary care, facilities and therapies is often difficult, especially for those with complex needs or for older children. There has also been an increase in the use of unregulated placements as a last resort, where accommodation is provided, but not good quality care.

While the local authority invested in development of our own residential provision, this option doesn't come without its challenges in terms of registration requirements, matching of children and managing voids. Recruitment and retention of foster carers is, also, a priority for Blaenau Gwent but we need to acknowledge that availability of prospective good quality foster carers is limited in a small borough facing poverty, high level of unemployment and reliance on state benefits. Our fostering households are aging and there is an annual natural loss leading to limited availability locally. We have developed strategies to attract generic foster carers via approval for respite only so they have an opportunity to experience the role without the pressure of a long term commitment. We, also, prioritise family placements by assessing connected people who are able and willing to look after children locally and this has led to an increase of children living with kinship foster carers.



Generic My Support Team (MyST) foster carers are to be recruited to act as realistic options for step down placements for complex children or as avoidant placements for those children who may escalate to residential placements. Our rate of disruption is low for Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) placements with 1 placement (children) breakdowns during the last financial year 1.23% and even for these cases, due to the work undertaken by the SGO support team, all children were accommodated with other family members or returned to their birth parents with none of them coming back into the care of the Local Authority.

SEWAS celebrated 10 years of the National Adoption Service with a regional event held in Blaenau Gwent in November 2024 to celebrate SEWAS being a regional service for 10 years. This event was a wonderful celebration of adoption, sharing stories and information with professionals in a morning session followed by a session of fun activities with children and families in the afternoon.

With a new Marketing and Recruitment Officer in post, activity is focusing on the recruitment of more prospective adopters and expanding the SEWAS adoption community. There has been increasing interest from prospective adopters in Welsh Early Permanency across the SEWAS region since the framework was launched across Wales with one child being placed within the Welsh Early Permanency arrangements within this 2024/25 time period.

Over the year, SEWAS has provided twenty-one Understanding the Child Days (UTC) for twenty-seven children; ten of these children have also received direct work. Twenty-six children have had Trauma Nurture Timelines completed over the year.

SEWAS are also now providing post adoption training across our 5 LA areas in line with the NAS contact planning tool. We are also collaborating with Torfaen Contact Centre around best practice for final contact. SEWAS has also established a Stay and Play Group, set up for adoptive families with pre-school children. Stay and Play is a fun, safe space for children and their parents to play, learn and meet others.

A CIW inspection was undertaken for the Fostering services with positive feedback being offered to the local authority regarding the quality of support offered to foster carers. The recommendations made were incorporated in an Action Plan that will be delivered during the following financial year.

Significant work has been delivered under the Children Looked After Reduction [Strategy](#) as while we have had recorded a consistent increase in referrals (Duty to report) into Children Services and child protection inquiries and registration, the number of children looked after remained quite stable by the end of the financial year 2024/2025

The Council has signed the Welsh Government's Corporate Parenting Charter, strengthening our commitment to ensuring the best services and opportunities for children and young people who have experienced care.

The Charter sets out 11 principles on equality, eradicating stigma, working together, inclusive support, fulfilling ambitions, nurturing, good health, a stable home, education, thriving in the future, and after care support. Blaenau Gwent has drafted its own Corporate Parenting plan linked to the Welsh Government charter, following an extensive engagement programme with care experienced children and young people. The plan is expected to be



signed off through the democratic process in 2025.

Flying Start Expansion

Flying Start is the Welsh Government's targeted Early Years programme for families with children under the age of 4 in some of the most disadvantaged areas of Wales. The programme's core elements, which include enhanced health visiting, parenting support, early language support, and part-time childcare for two-year-olds, have been shown to lead to positive outcomes for children and their families. The programme aims to tackle some of the inequalities faced by children who grow up in poverty.

The Welsh Government's Flying Start Programme is a geographically targeted initiative that relies on income benefit data, a proxy indicator for poverty, to identify areas with the highest proportions of children aged 0-3 living in income benefit households.

From September 2025, there will be an expansion of the Flying Start programme in Blaenau Gwent to an additional 150 children via phase 3; by rolling out the Flying Start childcare provision into a further 15 areas using existing methodology and geographical targeting.

To meet this target, existing Flying Start childcare providers will be supported to expand their reach, with work ongoing to encourage new providers in areas with lower numbers, including those who specialise in Welsh-medium provision, to offer Flying Start childcare places. A new Welsh-medium Day Nursery has been opened this year in 2025 and the seedling school, under construction in Tredegar, will include a dedicated Welsh-medium childcare facility so we are steadily increasing provision.

Preventing homelessness

During the reporting period, 160 households were identified as being at risk of homelessness, of these, 86 households (54%) were successfully supported to retain their accommodation. The service experiences significant challenges with a persistent shortage of move-on accommodation in both the private and social housing sectors, and many clients approaching the Council only at crisis point, limiting early intervention opportunities.

9 families were placed in bed and breakfast accommodation, which is below the target of 12, and represents a reduction of 3 compared to 2023/24. Whilst this is a positive step, the continued use of such unsuitable accommodation highlights ongoing pressures on homelessness services and the lack of suitable housing options for families. To address this, several initiatives have been implemented:

- A "Temp to Perm" Scheme and a Private Sector Leasing Scheme (PSL) have been launched in collaboration with private landlords; and
- The homelessness hostel has been remodelled in partnership with Pobl, releasing 10 additional units for direct homeless placements.

These efforts are already showing results, with 18 clients moving into permanent accommodation and 5 units now part of the leasing scheme, offering more sustainable housing solutions.

The Council continues to work closely with Registered Social Landlords to identify properties for homelessness and resettlement schemes. In 2024/25 4 properties were identified: 3 properties identified in partnership with Tai Calon and 1 property with United Welsh. These properties are included in a bid under the Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme (TACP) to further expand housing options.

Progress has been made in increasing housing availability with:

- 36 affordable homes delivered in 2024/25, up from 25 in 2023/24; and
- The Common Housing Register saw a reduction from 2,735 to 2,617 households.



However, completion of Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) works dropped from 94 to 53 due to budget constraints, negatively impacting performance indicators. We aim to deliver Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) in private homes within a target timescale of 330 days, supporting individuals to live independently in their own homes. The performance of the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) has experienced a decline, primarily due to the removal of the means test and ongoing pressures on the capital budget. These factors have impacted our ability to meet the target timescales for delivery. As a result, the average delivery time for a DFG has increased to approximately 460 days.

Despite these challenges, DFG remains a key performance indicator for the service. The council is currently reviewing the capital funding arrangements with the aim of streamlining the process. This review is expected to help reduce the existing backlog more efficiently and improve turnaround times, thereby enhancing overall performance.

In March 2025 the Council launched its Private Sector Empty Homes Strategy 2025-[2030](#) setting out the Council's plans to tackle the high number of empty homes in the Borough. As of April 2024, there were 1,023 empty homes in the Blaenau Gwent with 98 of them being empty for over 10 years. An action plan accompanies the strategy which sets out 3 objectives:

- **Objective 1:** Promote, educate and support empty property owners and prospective purchasers/developers;
- **Objective 2:** Prioritisation and targeted approach in addressing empty properties; and
- **Objective 3:** Take appropriate enforcement action to effectively deal with empty properties.

The action plan sets out a range of key actions which will be monitored throughout the year, the progress of the implementation of the strategy will be reported in the next self-assessment report.

Through a partnership approach the Youth Engagement and Progression Team continue to support young people to prevent youth homelessness and to support emotional wellbeing. Support has also been provided for the local response relating to the resettlement scheme for Ukrainian people and further engagement with housing solutions is planned for 2025/26.

While there have been notable improvements in affordable housing delivery and reductions in temporary accommodation use, homelessness continues to rise. The Council remains committed to expanding sustainable housing options and strengthening partnerships to meet the growing demand and reduce reliance on unsuitable temporary solutions.

Housing Benefit

The Department of Work and Pensions provides Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) monies to the Council to support residents on housing benefit or universal credit to 'top up' any shortfall that they have with paying rent and housing related expenses. Rents across the Borough have been increasing, a similar position to across Wales and the UK, and the reduction in funding since Covid are impacting these payments. This pot of money is used to prevent residents from becoming homeless and the increased number requiring support is putting pressure on the service. As there is a shortage of housing across the borough, many of those becoming homeless may require B&B accommodation which is costly and not an appropriate long-term solution.

The Government contribution for 2024/25 was £140,170 however the Council's actual spend for the year was £267,861 this additional funding is funded through the Council's internal budgets which proves a challenge, if the Council can't find additional funding, then applications could be refused, and residents could face homelessness if they are unable to pay the rent shortfall. This in time will cost the Local Authority more as temporary accommodation can prove costly. To note out of the 583 applications received for DHP 244 were refused due to non-eligibility.



There have been other challenges to the service due to government policy, which is outside of the Councils control, this includes welfare reform changes such as the Winter fuel payments. The Council regularly communicates with DWP for updates on relevant changes and contributes to consultations like the recent Green Paper on Welfare Reform.

Supporting communities to become more resilient

Repair café – Due to the success and appeal of the previous two repair cafes the council launched another repair café in Stocktonville Tredegar, repairing around 95 items in total since April 2024. A group of volunteers have diligently supported this initiative and fixed many items for residents of Tredegar. It is linked with the local community coffee morning which is well attended.

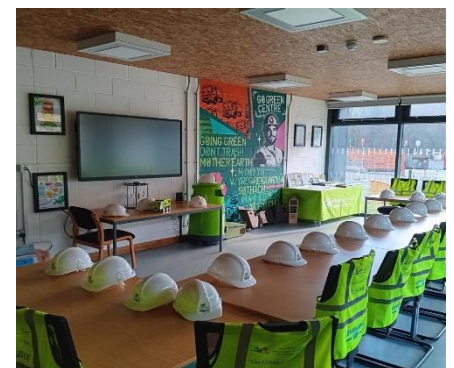


Community Kit room – [Blaenau Gwent CBC](#) have teamed up with Aneurin Leisure Trust to help establish sports reuse throughout the borough. The donated sports clothing will be used to support the community so that appropriate kit does not become a barrier to sports participation.



Education and artwork – Working with BG arts department the Council has put together sessions for schools at our education centre on reuse and the environment. The Council

has also linked with youth workers and a local artist to create a mural in their design at the education centre.



Bike repair event – BG linked with Dr Bike and Bryn bach Tredegar to host a bike pop up stall in July 24. The stall was successful with 10 repairs being carried out and further advice given to residents on fixes to bikes. We will be looking to make this a regular occurrence moving forward.

Community Safety

In response to growing concerns about youth-related crime and anti-social behaviour in the Borough, the Council established a multi-agency Anti-Social Behaviour Task Force in 2024. To reassure residents and improve visibility in hotspot areas, Community Safety Wardens were commissioned to work alongside Police Community Support Officers. Together, they provided regular patrols and helped rebuild trust within the community. Joint face-to-face engagement events offered advice, promoted reporting, and encouraged collaboration between residents, businesses, and local authorities.

The Council's Youth Detached Team played a key role, engaging over 2,000 young people in positive activities and successfully diverting them from trouble spots. Civil injunctions were granted for specific young people involved in persistent offending, with targeted interventions to address the underlying causes of their behaviour and prevent future incidents. Those young people complied with the conditions of their injunctions, and feedback from residents, businesses, and elected members was consistently positive.





The Council maintained open communication by providing regular updates through press releases, social media, and direct discussions with the public. The Task Force's achievements were recognised when it received the Welsh National Safer Communities [Award](#).

However, interpreting community safety data remains a challenge. As highlighted in the Community Safety Annual Report [2024](#), the recorded number of anti-social behaviour reports increased by 87% compared to 2023-24. Although this may seem negative at first glance, it reflects the Task Force's focus on encouraging residents and businesses to report incidents, making it difficult to set clear targets for reducing crime and anti-social behaviour.

Food Resilience programme

The Council was awarded UK Shared Prosperity Fund Communities & Place funding for 2023/24, 2024/25 and 2025/26 to build Food Resilience and develop community food initiatives relating to food

access, healthy eating and food growing across the Borough. The Blaenau Gwent food resilience programme was formed in consultation with Torfaen Council to build a co-ordinated approach to food resilience with the aim in the short term to support the impact of the current cost of living crisis, providing opportunities to tackle food poverty and engage with food producers to increase local and regional supply chains.

Working in partnership together with the BG Food Partnership, the food resilience priorities can be identified as taking action against the following issues:

1. Addressing the root causes of Food Poverty and barriers to accessing good food;
2. Encouraging Healthy, local & sustainable food consumption;
3. Improving the local food environment, community and culture, increasing skills, knowledge, and resources;
4. Encourage green spaces for local food growing initiatives; and
5. Supporting food businesses & the sustainable food economy.

During the year food resilience officers have been recruited to work in partnership with the BG Food Partnership coordinator to build relationships with various partners and stakeholders across the borough, to demonstrate a visible and accessible platform for change within our local food system. Engagement with businesses and community food providers has been a vital tool for both understanding the challenges residents face within a local context and identifying the key levers for change already present in the borough. A wide range of activity has taken place during 24/25 through the food resilience programme. Some of these activities include:

- **Administration of Food Funding;**
- **School holiday food insecurity provision;**
- **Community Food Network workshops; and**
- **BG Food Partnership Governance.**

The programme officers have played a key role in supporting the development a robust and responsive Community Food Strategy through meaningful community engagement and strategic collaboration with the Food Partnership Coordinator. By organising consultations, workshops, and focus groups, we gathered invaluable insights from residents, local organizations, and stakeholders on issues such as access to nutritious food, local food production, and waste reduction. These efforts ensured the strategy was informed by the community's needs and challenges.



The strategy's key priorities include:

- **Access** Ensure everyone in Blaenau Gwent can obtain healthy, affordable food with dignity;
- **Health** Improve diets and wellbeing by embedding nutritious food into everyday life;
- **Community & Business** Strengthen local food networks, supporting enterprises and social initiatives; and
- **Climate & Nature** Promote sustainable food practices that protect the environment and enhance biodiversity.

The Focus of the programme during 2025/26 will be on continued development and implementation of the BG Community Food Strategy through the four priority objectives as outlined above.

Reducing our food waste

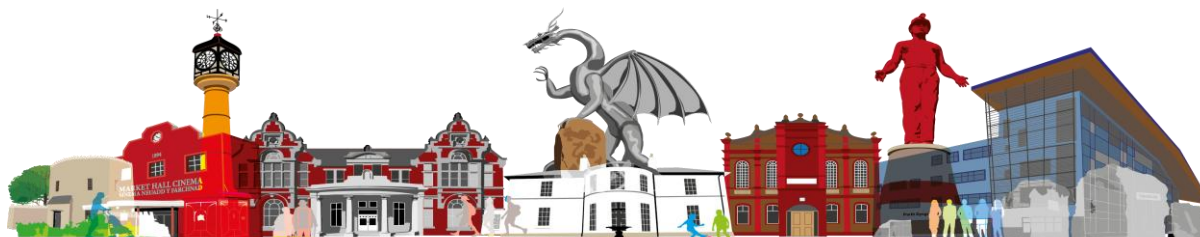
The council has been working across 5 primary schools as a pilot to support them in reducing food waste. 'Waste warriors' is a scheme designed to make the school meals service more sustainable. The aim of the scheme is for pupils to consider what goes in the bin from their lunch plates and weighing the waste on a regular basis to see if it declines. Further work is planned to roll out the scheme across more schools.

Key Challenges Identified for Action in 2025/26

- The performance of the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) has experienced a decline, primarily due to the removal of the means test and ongoing pressures on the capital budget. These factors have impacted our ability to meet the target timescales for delivery. Despite these challenges, DFG remains a key performance indicator. The council is reviewing capital funding and streamlining processes to reduce the backlog and improve turnaround times.
- Continue to monitor the implementation of the homelessness initiatives, which saw positive progress during 2024/25.
- Continue to implement the Private Sector Empty Homes Strategy 2025/2030 to expand sustainable housing options and reduce homelessness across the Borough.
- There is a challenge of sustainability in Social Services owing to a number of posts being grant funded. Workforce and capacity as a whole is included on the Council's Corporate Risk Register and is monitored regularly by the Joint Executive Team.
- The increasing cost of placements within Children's Services is placing a significant strain on budget which in turn is impacting available funding for other aspects of service. Work is being undertaken to closely monitor the spend of impact of placements and will be reported to Joint Executive Team on a quarterly basis.
- Recruitment and retention of foster carers is a priority for Blaenau Gwent. Work will be undertaken to increase the number of foster carers operating across Blaenau Gwent to reduce the need for private providers and to improve outcome for children looked after.
- Children looked after placed within the local area find it difficult to access the necessary care, facilities and therapies required, especially for those with complex needs or for older children. Work with the Complex Needs Panel to instigate the Continuing Care process with the purpose of removing barriers and collaborating with partners to ensure access to services and better outcomes for our children looked after.
- Continue to implement the children looked after strategy and monitor numbers to ensure a downward trend.



Performance Indicator	Data						
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	Performance
The number of adults provided with electronic assistive technology during the year	245	169	216	210	221	204	N/A
The total number of adult clients currently in receipt of electronic assistive technology.	1264	1353	1527	1639	1768	859	N/A
% of adults that requested assistive technology where equipment was installed	80.3%	65.0%	61.9%	66.9%	64.8%	65.0%	N/A
Number of children on Child Protection Register <i>(Lower Figure is Better)</i>	61	52	64	62	103	99	Improving
Number of Children becoming Looked After (During the Year) <i>(Lower Figure is Better)</i>	62	38	47	63	55	53	Improving
Total number of CLA who are placed within Wales, but outside of the responsible LA (excluding those in adoption placements) (as at 31st March) <i>(Lower Figure is Better)</i>	Not available	65	51	52	46	52	Declining
The total number of CLA at the end of the collection year who are placed outside of Wales (as at 31st March) <i>(Lower Figure is Better)</i>	Not available	5	6	12	16	15	Improving



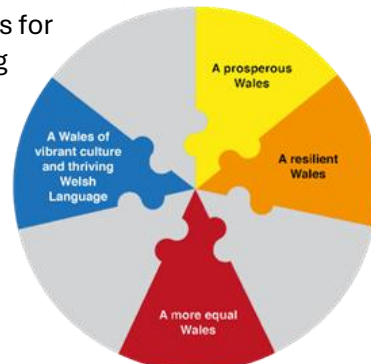
Performance Indicator	Data						Performance
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	
% households successfully prevented from homelessness (section 66) Target 60 (Higher Figure is Better)	72	59	75.2	63.5	55.2	54	Declining
Number of additional affordable housing units delivered Housing units can only be built depending on the amount of grant received by the local authority from WG. All funding is allocated to support the development of additional affordable housing units annually	7	67	43	6 units Total (5 units delivered via Social Housing Grant 1 unit delivered via S106)	25 units Total (25 units delivered via Social Housing Grant 0 units delivered via S106)	35 units delivered via Social Housing Grant 1 Unit delivered via Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme (TACP)	In line with Welsh Government grant
Numbers waiting on the social housing register (Lower Figure is Better)	2,151	1,218	4,191	4,688	2,735	2,617	Improving
Number of disabled facilities grants completed (Higher Figure is Better)	N/A	30	31	63	91	53	Declining
Homes for Ukraine Scheme: • Guests • Population Share Higher Figure is Better	-	-	-	57 74%	72 91%	70 89%	Declining



Well-being Objective 4

An ambitious and innovative council delivering the quality services at the right time and in the right place

Why This Is Important as an Area of Focus - The Corporate Plan provides the focus for delivering lasting change for the area. It also provides the platform for transforming Blaenau Gwent into a more confident and capable Council. The ambition is to deliver better outcomes for the people of Blaenau Gwent and that ambition is underpinned by solid and sustainable plans, ensuring the Council can be held to account for what it has promised to deliver. Maximising the impact of resources to deliver those outcomes sits at the heart of this priority, including; understanding costs, controlling expenditure, maximising income and aligning resources to the needs of residents, businesses and visitors to build a Blaenau Gwent for the future.



What We Aim to Achieve – Blaenau Gwent Council works in partnership to provide high quality services to meet local need, and improve the quality of life and well-being within the community.

How well are we doing?

The following narrative provides an evaluative reflection of the activity, undertaken throughout 2024/25, across service areas that directly support this Well-being Objective. The narrative reflects what has gone well but also, and more importantly, where we are experiencing challenges. These challenges have then been collated together at the end of each section. These areas will be identified as areas of focus moving forward and will be reported as part of our next Self-Assessment, as well as performance monitoring throughout the year.

Finance and Resources

Our financial performance for 2023/24 is contained within our Statement of [Accounts](#). The Statement of Accounts for the 2023/2024 financial year have not been completed and did not meet statutory deadlines.

The Council experienced delays in finalising and completing the audit of the 2022/23 Statement of Accounts which have subsequently impacted upon both the 2023/24 and 2024/25 accounts. A significant issue identified during the external audit of the Council's 2022/23 Statement of Accounts related to the governance failings / lack of council oversight of the joint venture agreement between the Council and Welsh Government (WG) for the Lime Avenue development. The agreement imposed a significant liability on the Council as the arrangement had been entered into without due consideration by senior leaders of the council. In March 2025, with the agreement of Welsh Government, the terms of the Lime Avenue Joint Venture were amended. The changes removed the requirement for the Council to purchase the Welsh Government capital share at that end of the agreement and, as a result, with effect from the date of the agreement, this significant liability has been removed.

The Council's Constitution and Financial Procedure Rules are being enhanced to more clearly define delegated responsibilities, specifying that any contractual agreements imposing significant long-term liabilities on the Council must be reviewed and approved by the Section 151 officer or their representative before being entered into. The circumstances and the impact of this issue has also been highlighted to senior leaders across the organisation to raise awareness of future risks and impact.

The preparation and audit of the final 2023/24 accounts is nearing completion with the final accounts and accompanying Audit Wales report scheduled for presentation to Governance & Audit Committee on 28th July 2025. The target date for preparation of the draft accounts for 2024/25 is September 2025. Significant progress has been made in addressing the issues that have contributed to the delays, and it is expected that the



preparation of the 2025/26 and future years annual accounts will be achieved in line with statutory deadlines.

The Council's budget is continuously monitored to ensure resources are used economically and efficiently, while enabling effective medium- and long-term planning. Robust financial planning and management processes are in place, with regular updates on the Council's financial position provided to senior officers and through the democratic process.

The Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) is the Council's core financial planning tool. It is a rolling plan aligned with the priorities of the Corporate Plan and is regularly updated to reflect changing circumstances and policy decisions affecting the Council's finances. The MTFS forecasts the Council's expenditure and required savings over a five-year period to achieve a balanced budget. Key assumptions include AEF – 3% uplift 2026/27 onwards; Council Tax – 4% annual increase; Pay Awards – 3% annually; Inflation – 2% per annum

The baseline revenue funding the Council received in 2023/24 from Welsh Government, after allowing for transfers, was £139.7m, an increase of 6.5% (£8.5m). The all-Wales average increase in the Local Government Settlement was 7.9%.

For 2024/25, the Council received a 2.8% (£3.95m) uplift in funding from Welsh Government. While this increase is welcomed, the current economic climate and cost-of-living crisis present significant financial challenges. The Council must deliver £1.93m budget reductions for 2025/26 and £34m over the five-year MTFS period.

To address these challenges, the Council must reconsider how services are delivered to achieve savings and generate income. This may involve reducing, altering, or discontinuing some services, or exploring alternative delivery models. To support this, a financial planning meeting—based on Torfaen Council's approach—has been introduced under the name 'Apollo'. These sessions will inform service redesign and financial planning.

Financial efficiencies totalling £6.48m were identified in setting the budget, with £1.5m in reserve funding earmarked to support a balanced budget.

The overall provisional outturn across all portfolios shows a favourable variance of £2.6m, after a net draw of £0.56m from specific reserves. As a result, the £1.5m reserve funding was not required to support the budget. Based on the provisional outturn, the Council's reserves will increase by £1.1m.

This positive financial position is primarily due to the effective use of specific grant funding and the late allocation of grants from Welsh Government, which helped offset existing cost pressures during the financial year.

The revenue budget financial statement provisional outturn as at 31st March 2025:

Portfolio/ Committee	2024/2025 Revised Revenue Budget	2024/2025 Provisional Outturn	Favourable/ (Adverse) Variance
	£m	£m	£m
Corporate Services	26.32	25.07	1.25
Social Services	53.55	53.45	0.10
Education & Leisure	74.27	74.85	(0.58)
Economy	1.57	0.52	1.05
Environment	33.30	32.6	0.70



Planning	1.15	1.03	0.12
Licensing	0.12	0.12	0
Total	190.28	187.64	2.64

Our work continues in the context of increasing financial challenges. We must remain proactive in managing with limited resources by adopting more effective and efficient ways of working. It is essential that we adapt our operational practices and rethink service delivery to meet these challenges head-on.

Looking ahead, we will maintain our focus on delivering efficiencies and savings, and investing in new technologies to protect frontline services. However, we must also fundamentally rethink how all services are delivered.

Workforce

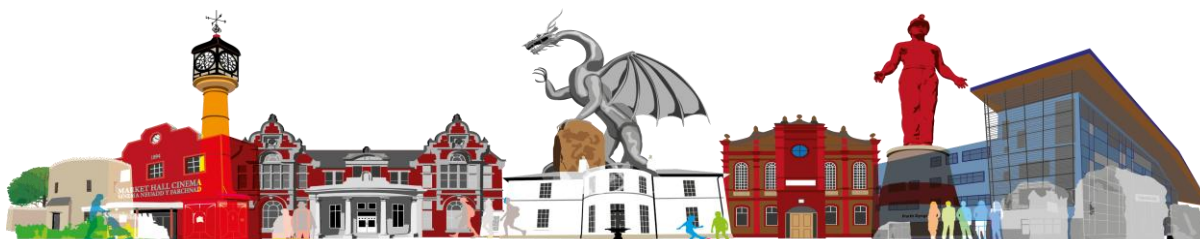
The Council has some difficulties with recruiting into some professional and technical roles. There is some reliance on agency workers to cover staff absence and hard to fill specialist roles and projects. As of Quarter 4 2024/25, our workforce information is as follows:

	Council (Including schools)	Corporate Services	Regeneration/ Community Services	Social Services	Education	Schools
Employee Headcount	3198	307	928	611	106	1246
Agency Worker Headcount (Matrix)	24	1	21	2	N/A	N/A
Employee FTE	2332.31	286.52	540.72	506.64	88.23	910.2
Employee FTE as a % of the Council FTE	100.00%	12.28%	23.18%	21.72%	3.78%	39.03%
% of permanent positions vacant (no directly employed cover)	4.93%	9.84%	6.84%	8.68%	6.67%	N/A
% Labour Turnover	3.28%	4.52%	2.89%	3.54%	0.95%	1.02%
Days lost to sickness per FTE (cumulative outturn)	13.85	6.02	13.13	17.93	10.70	14.80
% of days lost to short term sickness	30%	35%	29%	20%	36%	36%
% of days lost to long term sickness	70%	65%	71%	80%	64%	64%
% of staff with no sickness absence	74.00%	87.38%	78.07%	76.21%	77.17%	66.91%

Psychiatric or mental health issues are the leading cause of sickness absence across the Council, accounting for 25.29% of work-related days lost.

There are a series of actions in place to include regular monitoring of performance, target setting at service and Council level and case analysis. An in-depth review of sickness absence and well-being is undertaken on an annual basis, and this is scrutinised by Members.

As of March 25, there have been 2 cases of recorded capability in 2024/25 and 9 grievance cases, The UK gender pay gap for employees is 13.1% (2024). At the Council men and women are paid equally for doing equivalent jobs across the business. The gender pay gap shows that the workforce is predominantly female with women occupying a high percentage of jobs across all four pay quartiles. The pay gap in Blaenau



Gwent continues to be significantly lower than the national average.

On an annual basis the Council is expected to report on its annual performance with regards to health, safety and welfare at work. The number of employee accidents/incidents has decreased from 304 in 2023/24 to 251 in 2024/25. The number of non-employee accidents has decreased 299 in 2023/24 to 221 in 2024/25. The number of employee accidents/incidents reportable to the HSE has slightly decreased 19 in 2023/24 to 18 in 2024/25.

Corporate Safeguarding

Audit Wales undertook a follow up review of the Council's Corporate Safeguarding arrangements and reported their findings to the Council in February 2025. Publication of the report by Audit Wales was in June 2025, in line with Council reporting.

Audit Wales Findings

Having robust corporate safeguarding arrangements can provide a Council with assurance that all employees, elected members, volunteers, school governors and contractors have a role in safeguarding and promote the wellbeing of children and adults who may be at risk of harm.

- In 2014, Audit Wales undertook a review of the Council's arrangements to support the safeguarding of children and at that time made three proposals for improvement.
- In 2015, the Auditor General for Wales published a national report following a review of corporate safeguarding arrangements across Welsh councils. That report made eight recommendations, of which seven related directly to councils and one related to the Welsh Government.
- In 2019, Audit Wales assessed how the Council had addressed the proposals for improvements and recommendations from both the 2014 and 2015 reports. At that time, they found that the Council had made limited progress, and safeguarding arrangements were not consistent enough to provide assurance across all service areas. The Council had not fully addressed eight of the ten national recommendations and local proposals for improvement.
- In 2022, a further review was undertaken by Audit Wales to assess the Council's progress in addressing the outstanding recommendations and proposals for improvement. It was concluded that the pandemic further delayed the Council's progress in addressing the recommendations, although it had taken recent action to strengthen its corporate safeguarding arrangements. However, the Council had not fully addressed previous recommendations, and two further recommendations were issued.
- In November 2024, the most recent review was undertaken to assess whether the Council had made effective progress since 2022 in addressing the outstanding recommendations. As a result, the review only focussed on aspects of corporate safeguarding arrangements covered by those recommendations. The review did not cover the following areas, as these have been previously audited as being well established:
 - all aspects of the Council's corporate safeguarding arrangements;
 - specific safeguarding arrangements in Education or Social Services;
 - specific arrangements for safeguarding referrals; or
 - outcomes of safeguarding referrals.

Overall, Audit Wales found that the Council has not made sufficient progress to address the outstanding corporate safeguarding recommendations.

Since this time, the Council has been undertaking a full review of its arrangements in order to develop an action [plan](#) that fully addresses the outstanding recommendations.



The Council has put in place a Corporate Safeguarding Board of strategic officers as well as an operational Designated Safeguarding Persons Group who will work to implement the action plan and ensure that safeguarding remains high on the agenda across all Council services.

Some progress to date includes:

- Providing specific service area safeguarding reports so that proper scrutiny and analysis can be provided to this important Council priority. Moving forward the reports will be:
 - Children's Safeguarding – Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Committee;
 - Education Safeguarding - Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Committee;
 - Adult Safeguarding – Adult and Communities Scrutiny Committee; and
 - Corporate Safeguarding – Corporate Governance and Resources Scrutiny Committee.
- A review of the Safeguarding Strategy has been undertaken and is to go through the democratic process during 2025.
- Officers have been included on the Council's e-learning platform in order to undertake essential learning modules, including safeguarding.

Community Hubs

The Council's Community Hub model continues to be strengthened, delivery across the borough from Libraries with relevant and targeted support based around the four strands in the Councils Cost -of -living action plan which provides a focus on Housing, Food, Fuel and Benefit/ Grant support. Officers across all community hubs continue to provide advice on a range of issues including budgeting as well as signposting customers to third party organisations for specialised advice. Other support available via the Councils community hubs include advice and guidance on council tax and blue badge applications as well as support to improve residents' digital skills.

The table below provides a breakdown of the number of residents supported through the Community Hubs during the period based on venues:

	Abertillery	Blaina	Brynmawr	Cwm	Ebbw Vale	Llanhilleth	Tredeggar	JCP	Overall
May	142	10	108	19	144	0	131	0	572
June	122	14	109	17	156	0	142	3	600
July	112	17	101	12	148	0	112	7	525
August	103	10	111	15	157	3	100	1	515
September	3	19	109	15	141	4	98	3	413
October	50	30	120	21	169	2	132	4	558
November	93	24	89	32	139	21	107	0	543
December	58	11	59	18	106	7	97	0	406



January	108	18	87	14	97	0	90	0	470
February	128	17	109	16	171	0	86	0	558
March	88	23	96	13	144	3	103	0	490

Procurement

The 2024/25 Annual Procurement Plan was successfully delivered with over 100 contracts being awarded over the 12 month period.

Corporate Procurement officers continue to support collaborative procurement opportunities across the Welsh public sector. As a proactive member of regional and national networks, we are working collectively to maximise commercial opportunities and develop best practice to support socially responsible procurement including social value, decarbonisation, fair work and safeguarding

February 2025 saw the most significant changes to procurement legislation in the last decade with both the Procurement Act 2023 and Procurement Regulations 2024 coming into effect. The introduction of the changes has required significant resourcing to ensure continued compliance and adoption into business as usual operations.

As system administrators, officers supported a major upgrade of the corporate E-purchasing system, which also included the expansion to Blaenau Gwent Schools. Also, the Corporate Purchase Card programme continued to see expansion with over 80 cards now in circulation across corporate services and schools.

The Procurement Service demonstrated strong performance in strategic planning, operational delivery, and compliance. Despite significant external challenges (e.g., legislative changes, contractor insolvency, system migrations), the team-maintained service continuity and supported a wide range of critical projects. Continued focus on system improvements, staff training, and collaborative commissioning will be key to sustaining performance into 2025/26

In 2024 Audit Wales conducted an audit focusing on the arrangements the Council has for commissioning [services](#). The findings and recommendations have been presented to Senior officers to action. The progress of recommendations has been reported through the Council's democratic process and can be found [here](#)

Welsh Language

The Council's Welsh Language Promotion [Strategy](#) has been developed in line with Welsh Governments target of reaching 1 million Welsh speakers across Wales by 2050.

Significant progress has been made in enhancing the Council's performance monitoring framework through the internal business planning process. Now, all directorates and service areas are required to submit quarterly updates detailing their compliance with Welsh Language Standards and the actions undertaken to support the objectives outlined in the Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2022/27.

2024/25 Council data shows that the Council has identified 42 members of staff who are fluent Welsh speakers. The total number of staff who have Welsh language speaking skills ranging from 'fluently', 'quite well', 'moderately', 'foundation' to Courtesy/Entry Level, is 629. This is an increase of 24 members of staff from the 2023/24 reporting period (605 members of staff reported in 2023/24).



Staff are encouraged to participate in Welsh language training through Dysgu Cymraeg, with free tutor-led courses available. 629 staff have reported some level of Welsh-speaking ability, with improvements in reading and writing skills. Efforts continue to encourage staff to update their language skills and use Welsh in workplace interactions. Automated telephone messages and staff training have been updated to ensure bilingual service delivery and a Teams channel was created to connect Welsh-speaking staff for call handling.

Shared Prosperity Funding has been secured to support Welsh language visibility and activities. Events like Dydd Miwsig Cymru, Welsh Rarebit Day, and Diwrnod Shwmae have been celebrated to promote Welsh culture. Local businesses and schools actively participated in Welsh language initiatives.

Admissions to Welsh-medium schools have increased, and a feasibility study is planned for further provision. Ysgol Gymraeg Tredegar opened in a temporary location, with plans for a permanent building by Autumn 2025/26.

A review has been undertaken to consider recruitment processes and Welsh Language ability. Over the past 12 months only 1 role has gone out as Welsh Language essential and it is important for the Council to consider roles which should have some form of Welsh language ability this will be a focus for the year ahead.

In November 2021, the Welsh Language Commissioners Office (WLCO) opened an investigation with Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council following concerns whether the Council was compliant with the Welsh Language Standards in terms of providing a Welsh language telephone service.

- **April 2022**- the Council provided an initial response to the investigation, which, in turn, raised further compliance concerns with regards to promoting services, assessing the language skills of staff, providing training opportunities, and assessing the language needs of posts. This led to the terms of reference for the investigation being widened to include a number of additional operational standards.
- **September 2022** a final determination of the investigation was provided to the Council outlining the steps required to reach compliance and expected delivery timeframes. It also requested the Council take forward an organisational to develop an Action Plan.
- **January 2023** – action plan signed off by the Council’s Leadership team
- **March 2023** - core group was formed to support the implementation of the Action Plan.
- **July 2024** a Confirmation was received from the WLCO on 1st July 2024 that the investigation had been successfully implemented and therefore closed.

Following the conclusion of the Welsh Language Compliance Investigation in 2024, our contact centre staff have been engaging in regular practice sessions led by our Welsh Language Support Officer. These sessions focus on telephone procedures, key words, and essential phrases, ensuring staff maintain accuracy in both process and pronunciation. They also provide a valuable opportunity for staff to refine their greetings and address any questions they may have. The initiative has been met with enthusiasm, leading to a noticeable boost in staff confidence when handling calls on the Welsh language telephone line.

In June 2024, the WLCO began investigating Aneurin Leisure Trust for limited Welsh language use online and at Parc Bryn Bach. The Council and Trust were required to develop an Action Plan, which was approved in September 2024 with a completion deadline of March 2025. Action leads met every six weeks to monitor progress and ensure compliance. In March 2025, the WLCO closed the investigation, requiring no further action. The Welsh Language Core Compliance Officer Group continues to oversee adherence to Welsh Language Standards with updated membership and terms of reference.

Complaints and Compliments

The Council has improved the reporting of complaints and compliments within the organisation by creating a Performance Information interactive dashboard. This tool enables the reader to examine the complaints and



compliments submitted to the organisation over the last four years as well as being able to identify the number of complaints per service area received. During the year there has been 213 cases of feedback recorded across the Council.

These 213 cases consisted of:

- 125 Corporate complaints;
- 19 Social Services complaints; and
- 69 compliments.

For the period 142 cases were closed (completed). For the Corporate Complaints, 78% (98) were completed within the timescale, 18% (22) were after the timescale, but within 20 working days and 4% (5) within 3 months. Of the Corporate complaints received during the period, 50 were not upheld, 63 were upheld and 12 were cancelled. For the Social Services complaints, 6 complaints were closed within the timescale, 8 within 3 months and 3 within 6 months and none took longer than 6 months. Of the Social Services complaints closed during the period, 7 complaints were not upheld, 1 complaint was upheld and 9 of the complaints received were found that the investigation was not merited or the investigation was discontinued.

Information Governance

During the period the Council received a total of 959 Freedom of Information (FOI) requests. This is down from the previous year where 1044 requests were received. Under legislation, the Council is expected to respond to FOIs within 20 working days. In the last two years Council has achieved a response rate within the permitted 20 working days of 88%. However, in the 2024/2025 improvements have been made to this and a response rate of 91.6% (878 out of 959) has been achieved.

Detail	Volume 2023/24	Volume 2024/25
Total FOIs received	1044	959
Success rate within 20 working days	918 (87.93%)	878 (91.6%)
Late but provided	90 (8.62%)*	78 (8.1%)
Still Outstanding	36 (3.45%)*	3 (0.3%)

*these figures were taken at approximately the same date last year but have subsequently improved

This year the Council received a total of 88 enquiries to make a Subject Access Request and receive copies of the information held about themselves in line with the Data Protection Legislation. This is a slight increase on the 83 received during the previous period and maintains the significant increase from 60 enquiries in the 2022/2023 period. The Council are not permitted under the legislation to ask for reasoning or justification as to why the requester is making the enquiry so understanding the reasoning behind this increase is difficult other than to assume that the public are more aware of their rights under the legislation and that staff are able to recognise such requests better to ensure that the correct process is followed.

Before releasing any information to a requestor, to maintain privacy and security, the legislation requires that it is firstly established that each requestor is entitled to receive the information, before the request can be considered valid. To do this, and to ensure consistency for all requests, the Council requires ID from each requestor to evidence their entitlement and prove identity. For a variety of reasons, a number of requestors fail to respond to the initial screening exercise. For the 2024/2025 period, of the 88 requests received for Subject Access, only 46 were deemed valid by providing the relevant ID. This is a reduction on last year where 54 achieved a status of being valid.

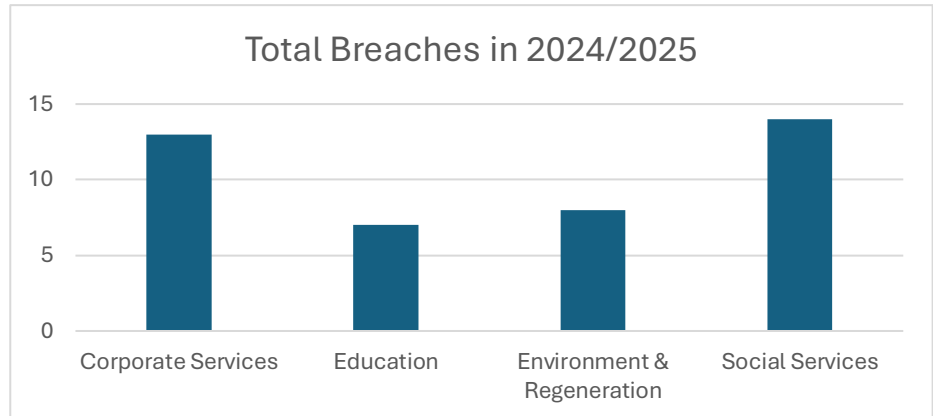
A standard Subject Access Request is permitted 30 calendar days from the time it becomes valid to provide the information to the requestor. In rare circumstances it is permitted to extend the time from the standard 30 days to 90 days where it can be demonstrated that a request is large or complex. In the 2024/2025 only 3 requests



had the time extension applied for Blaenau Gwent.

During the 2024/25 period a total of 37 out of 46 valid requests were provided with copies of their information within the permitted time. Of the 9 that exceeded the permitted time the average time to fulfil the request was 63 days compared to 16 days for requests completed within the permitted time period.

During the 2024/25 period the Council as a whole recorded a total of 42 data breaches but only a small number of these required reporting to the ICO. This is an increase from 34 in the 2023/2024 period but within the same bracket of between 30-45 per year that has been noted over the last 5 years. An increase in reported data breaches, whilst not a desirable trend, could also be viewed as positive as it could mean that staff are becoming more aware of their obligations and willing to report incidents through the appropriate channels, and this in turn enables the Council to handle the incidents correctly in line with the legislation.



Elected Members and the Constitution

The Council has set out minimum standards of behaviour and has provided guidelines to help maintain and improve standards. The Council's Constitution is a key document which sets out how the Council operates, how decisions are made, and the procedures followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and accountable to local people. It also includes a code of conduct for both officers and members.

The Council has in place comprehensive arrangements for Elected Members. As part of this, there is an extensive Member Development Programme in place, aligned to the forward work programmes of the Committees and Council priorities as well as from the Personal Development Review (PDR) process in place for members. A variety of training materials, guidance and documentation is available to members and this is included within an online member library.

During 2024/25 the Council had in operation four Scrutiny Committees:

- Corporate and Performance Scrutiny Committee;
- Partnership Scrutiny Committee;
- People Scrutiny Committee; and
- Place Scrutiny Committee.

Each Committee conforms to legislative requirements including compliance with the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009, Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. The decision-making process is documented, and the Authority's Scrutiny Committees can 'call in' a decision which has been made by the Cabinet but not yet implemented. No decisions were called in during 2024/25.

Evaluations are undertaken after every scrutiny meeting to review the processes in place and where further improvement can be sought. An annual evaluation questionnaire was also sent to all members in February 2025, and the response rate was 45% (15 Members).



Learning from this included:

- Work life balance and time management support – information included in the Members Library, and Member Well-being Champion identified
- Councillor security – information included in Members Library and a working group in place to look at member safety
- Member involvement in FWP – meeting with Chairs and Vice-Chairs and FWP an item for discussion at the first meeting of every committee
- Refresher training for members – Extensive Member Development programme in place, Members library available, WLGA have a variety of training materials available

Research is also undertaken from Scrutiny processes across Wales. This learning has led to an extensive review and change of the current democratic processes including a reduction in minutes, the live recording of meetings, significantly reduced agendas which only include key items and reducing the size of committees”

A full review of the Constitution was agreed at Council on 21st September 2023 and in November 2023, a supplementary amendment was approved to reflect arrangements for the appointment of the Chief Executive.

For 2024/25, one complaint against a member was taken forward for formal investigation by the Ombudsman’s Office. No whistleblowing complaints were received for the same period.

Internal and External Audit

The Council is subject to numerous internal and external audits and regulatory reviews each year. These are undertaken to ensure the Council provides value for money, services are being run efficiently and effectively, and that improved services are being delivered. The Council is monitored by a number of external regulatory bodies, the main of which are: Audit Wales; Care Inspectorate Wales; and Estyn.

Audit Wales

Engagement arrangements with Audit Wales are in place with meetings held with the Head of Governance and Partnerships, with the Section 151 Officer and also the Chief Executive.

Audit Wales Reporting during 2024/25 include:

Local Reports	National Audit Wales Reports	Audit Wales Reports still in Progress
• Use of performance information: Service User perspective and Outcomes • Digital Strategy Review • Financial Sustainability Review • Arrangements for Commissioning Services • Corporate Safeguarding Arrangements Follow Up Report	• Use of Performance Information – Service User Perspective and Outcomes • Digital by design? Lessons from our digital strategy review across councils in Wales • Governance of National Park Authorities • Affordable Housing National Report • Active Travel • Financial Management and Governance – Lessons from Audit for Community and Town Councils in Wales	• Temporary Accommodation – National Study • Counter Fraud Arrangements – local study



The Annual Audit Summary for 2023 from Audit Wales is expected following the signoff of the Blaenau Gwent accounts in 2023. The report will include a synopsis of each review undertaken by Audit Wales over the year.

Estyn

The Authority's Education Services have regular Local Authority Link Inspector (LALI) meetings convened with Estyn in line with inspectorate requirements. The Education Leadership Team reports progress against the Local Government Education Services (LGES) framework to Scrutiny and Cabinet. The Authority has update meetings between the Corporate Director Education, Members, and the Welsh Government officials as and when required and the Education Achievement Service (EAS) also provides updates on the school improvement agenda to the Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee.

Care Inspectorate Wales

Social Services is subject to audit, inspection and review by Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW). On a quarterly basis, the Corporate Director of Social Services and Heads of Adult and Children's Services meet with CIW to discuss achievements, performance and key challenges.

During the year, the Council received the following local reports from CIW:

- Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Fostering Services
- Cwrt Mytton Home For The Elderly
- Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Homecare

The Council also received the following national report from the Public Services Ombudsman:

- Are we caring for our carers?

Progress following recommendations from these inspections continued to be monitored in the Council's business plans and reported through the democratic process.

Internal Audit

An annual report, outlining areas that have undergone an assessment via Internal Audit, is provided to the Council's Governance and Audit Committee and also included in the Audit and Risk Manager's objective review of the Authority's system of internal control.

Internal Audit issued 25 final audit reports during the year:

Audit Grading	No of audits
Full Assurance	5
Reasonable Assurance	17
Limited Assurance	1
No Assurance	2

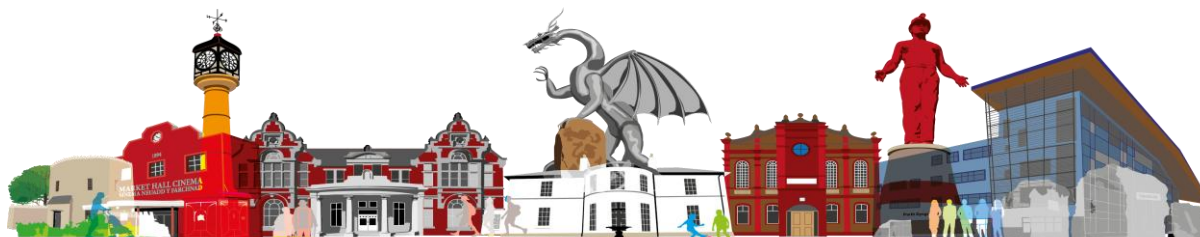


Key Challenges Identified for Action in 2025/26

- The Council needs to accelerate its response to implementing the outstanding recommendations from the Audit Wales review of Corporate Safeguarding. This will be monitored throughout the year and will be included in the self-assessment 2025/26.
- The Council need to ensure it responds to all outstanding Audit recommendations. This will be achieved via monitoring of the Council's business plans and reporting of risk and assurance tracker.
- The Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process remains a crucial tool for facilitating and informing our decision-making processes. Recognising the need for improvement, we have identified better monitoring of the IIA's usage as a key action for the 2025/26 period. This will be a primary focus as part of the SEP Year 2 action plan to ensure the process is effectively utilised and continuously improved.
- Significant progress has been made in addressing the issues that have contributed to the delay in reporting the final accounts for 2023/24, however, it is expected that the preparation of the 2025/26 and future years annual accounts will be achieved in line with statutory deadlines.
- A review has been undertaken to consider recruitment processes and Welsh Language ability. Over the past 12 months only 1 role has gone out as Welsh Language essential and it is important for the Council to consider roles which should have some form of Welsh language ability. Work to be undertaken with OD to address this challenge.
- The Council must deliver budget reductions of £34m over the five-year MTFS. Financial planning meetings are in place to inform service redesign and financial planning for the future.
- The number of days lost to sickness has increased during the year from 11.82 days per full time equivalent for 2023/24 to 13.85 days for 2024/25. Our workforce sickness continues to be regularly monitored, and sickness targets continue to be set at a service and Council wide level.



Performance Indicator	Data						Performance
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	
Number of Corporate Complaints received by Blaenau Gwent Council (Stage 1 & Stage 2) (Excludes Social Services) Lower Figure is Better	-	-	100	121	84	125	Declining
Number of Stage 1 Corporate complaints investigated by Blaenau Gwent Council (Excludes cancelled) Lower Figure is Better	-	-	85	112	76	106	Declining
Number of Stage 1 Corporate Complaints investigated within 10 working days during the period Higher Percentage is Better	-	-	54 (63.5%)	83 (74.1%)	62 (81.5%)	81 (76.4%)	Declining
Number of Corporate Complaints Closed at Stage 2 during the period Lower Figure is Better	-	-	2	1	1	6	Declining
Number of Social Services Complaints Received during the period Lower Figure is Better	-	-	5	13	9	19	Declining
Number of Social Services Complaints closed during the period Higher Figure is Better	-	-	3	11	7	13	Declining
Number of Compliments received by Blaenau Gwent Council Higher Figure is Better	-	-	29	28	46	69	Improving



Council attendance and sickness The number of working days / shifts per full time equivalent (FTE) local authority employee lost due to sickness absence 10 days per FTE Lower Figure is Better	13.9	11.67	16.74	15.5	11.8	13.85	Declining
Total employee headcount Council Schools N/A	2777 1565 1212	2,854 1,648 1,206	2896 1673 1223	2,953 1650 1303	3208.50 1902 1272.50	3198 1952 1246	N/A



Our Priorities and the Challenges for 2025/26 and Beyond

It is important to the organisation, to not just review the services we are delivering to our residents and businesses, and the impact they are having, but we must also ensure that our own internal processes and systems are working well, ensuring we are using the resources available to us as efficiently and effectively as possible, with robust controls, systems and processes supporting every aspect of the Council's activity.

Throughout the year, we have carried out various monitoring exercises against the activities we deemed areas for improvement or development within last year's self-assessment report. These activities are reflected in the appropriate Business Plans and are monitored on a quarterly basis by the Directorates and reported to the Executive Team. Where there are areas we feel haven't improved as intended, we will continue to monitor closely over the coming year, to help achieve our ambition to become an outstanding Council.

Following review, we have used our framework to undertake an organisational self-assessment, drawing conclusions and setting out the actions that need to be taken, going forward. Progress against our commitments is to be monitored annually moving forward and our key findings for 2024/25 are included within the following section of this report. We have also identified a number of challenges we are facing associated with each of our Well-being Objectives. In order to progress these areas moving forward we have developed an action plan for 2025/26 and beyond. This annual approach to planning means that our plans going forward will be iterative and agile, taking into consideration any new initiatives, challenges and opportunities that have arisen which can be responded to, throughout the lifespan of the Corporate Plan.

Throughout the year, we will use our business planning to monitor and demonstrate our progress on a regular basis, in order to evidence the success of our ambitions. This will be central to delivering upon our aspirations.

Progress against our Characteristics of an Outstanding Council

It is important to the organisation, to not just review the services we are delivering to our residents and businesses, and the impact they are having, but we must also ensure that our own internal processes and systems are working well, ensuring we are using the resources available to us as efficiently and effectively as possible, with robust controls, systems and processes supporting every aspect of the Council's activity.

The development of our Corporate Plan was important in setting our priorities and commitments, but without defined specific organisational conditions, we will never be as effective as we can be in delivering upon all of the outcomes we are seeking to achieve. Therefore, in order to review where we are organisationally and to provide a full picture of Council activity, the following section provides an overview of our progress against the Characteristics of an Outstanding Council.

An Innovative Council that

- is transformative and prepared to do things differently
- has an appetite for risk
- fosters innovation inside and outside the workplace
- is inquisitive and open to new trends and technologies

Our focus has developed over the last year, in line with our characteristics, and many changes have taken place to help us become more innovative as a Council. Importantly, we have continued to adjust quickly and respond positively to new challenges and initiatives, demonstrating that there is a willingness to adapt and deliver in ever changing circumstances. However, as we move forward, we must match our willingness to take risks and deliver new innovative projects, with the pragmatism required to bring projects to an end when it is clear we are unable to take them forward or they will not deliver intended benefits.



During 2024/25 we have focussed on developing the skills, knowledge and experience of all our staff so they are able to meet changing demands in service delivery and priorities. We have implemented a new online learning and development platform called Thinqi that provides accessible training and development information to meet the needs of individuals and services.

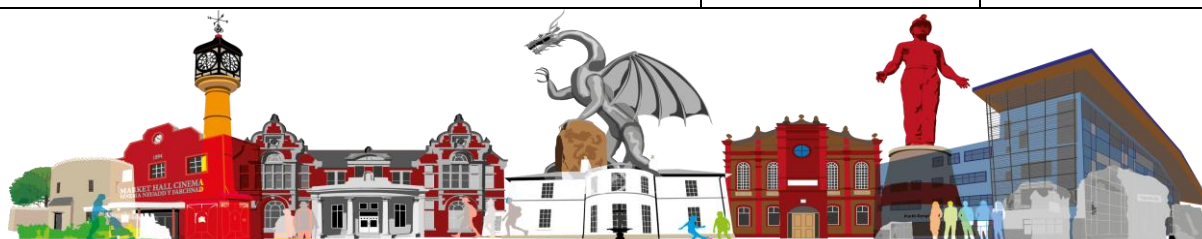
Risk Management

The Council recognises that risk is inherent in everything it does and that some level of risk-taking is necessary to achieve its ambitions and aspirations for the county. However, the Council also acknowledges that it has a duty to protect the public interest and safeguard the resources entrusted to it by the residents and taxpayers of

Blaenau Gwent. Therefore, the purpose of risk management is to ensure that the Council has a robust and consistent framework for identifying, evaluating, and managing the risks that may affect our strategic and operational objectives, as well as the Council's reputation and public confidence.

A risk register is provided to senior leaders and reported through Governance and Audit Committee to help monitor the key risks facing the Council. It is a document that records risks and importantly contains the actions that are needed to be made to mitigate or manage them. It helps to priorities resources and can help address any emerging risks in a timely manner. As of March 2025, the Council had identified 9 corporate risks 7 of these are classified as High, 1 classified as Critical and one classified as Medium which will be de-escalated from the Corporate Risk Register.

Risk Reference and Description	Risk Score (as at March 2025)	Direction of Travel from Previous Quarter
CRR1: Failure to deliver and sustain the changes required to ensure that vital services are prioritised within the financial constraints faced by the Council.	High	↓
CRR4: Safeguarding - Failure to ensure adequate safeguarding arrangements are in place for vulnerable people in Blaenau Gwent	High	↑
CRR5: There is a risk that the Council's Business Continuity processes are not robust enough to enable the provision of critical services in an emergency.	High	↔
CRR14: Failure to improve staff attendance rates within the Council will lead to an unacceptable impact on the ability of the Council to deliver services effectively and financially.	Critical	↑
CRR19: If the Council does not manage its information assets in accordance with requirements set down within legislation, then it may be faced with financial penalties and possible sanctions that hinder service delivery.	High	↔
CRR21: The Financial resilience of the Council could be at risk if the Council does not ensure that financial planning and management decisions support long term stability and sustainability	High	↓
CRR22: Failure to deliver the Council's priorities within the agreed annual budget resulting in the increased use of emergency finance measures and the drawdown of reserves.	Medium	↓
CRR25: The school in an Estyn category and currently in receipt of Council Intervention fails to make appropriate progress against the Statutory Warning Notice to Improve and Post Inspection Action Plan.	High	↓



CRR28: Failure to maintain appropriately skilled, adequate staffing resources will lead to an unacceptable impact on the ability of the Council to deliver services effectively.	High	
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Moving forward, risk management is to be one of the first areas that Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent Council's will look to align. Meetings have taken place with the relevant officers to establish the differences in each approach and to consider which aspects to take forward so that one effective framework can be implemented across both Councils. A review of the Council's risk registers is underway which will inform a comprehensive review of the Corporate Risk Register.

Rebel BGT

The challenges faced by councils today such as the impact of global events, shrinking budgets, cost of living, escalating demand, and growing inequality across our communities, aren't problems we can solve with yesterday's tools. These are deep, interconnected challenges that demand new approaches, fresh perspectives, bold experimentation and collective creativity. That's where Rebel BGT comes in.

Rebel BGT isn't a project, a policy or just a concept, it's a mindset and culture. A way of behaving that values curiosity over certainty, collaboration over silos, and experimentation over perfection. It's about creating a culture where unconventional thinking is welcomed, where diverse perspectives are not just accepted but actively sought out, and where innovation thrives through collaboration. We want to build a work environment that's alive with innovation and ideas - a place where creativity, curiosity, and courage are part of our everyday toolkit.

All staff in Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen Councils can play a vital leadership role. Rebel BGT is for everyone. Rebel BGT is about making a difference, challenging the norm, and shaping the future of the Council so we reach our goals and deliver against our objectives. Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen staff will be able to:

- Share and vote on your boldest ideas
- Comment on others' suggestions
- Track how ideas evolve and influence our direction
- What would you change or improve?
- What's holding us back?
- Where do you see opportunities for innovation?
- How can we work better together?
- How can we better serve our communities?

Artificial Intelligence

The Council is looking to drive innovation and increase efficiency in its services by adopting AI practices into everyday activity. The Council has been using Co Pilot for some time and this, alongside more targeted use of AI, has started to see a number of improvements to service delivery. Completed projects to date are outlined below, with a number of other projects in progress.

- **Automation in Supervisions** – the project exemplifies how targeted automation can unlock capacity, improve service quality and support a culture for continuous improvement.
- **Automation in Democratic Services** – Initial focus was on one Committee but the project is scalable to cover other committees, setting a precedent for future innovation across Council services.
- **Use of Power Platform in Adult Services** to streamline the authorisation of commissioned services – can be used across other services
- **Education Fixed Penalty Notices** - Achieved 29.84% time and 31.02% cost savings. Completed project using Capita ONE FPN module.
- **Tech Services Order Book** - Automating high-volume service request processing, reducing manual workload and improving.



This work demonstrates the council's commitment to innovation, efficiency, and citizen-focused service delivery through smart digital investment.

An Aspirational and Visionary Council

- improves lives through effective political and officer leadership
- identifies and grasps opportunities for the future
- Sets a clear direction and long-term goals
- Reduces its carbon footprint

We have set a clear direction within our organisation and share our long-term goals for improving Well-Being across Blaenau Gwent. Our Corporate Plan aims to do this by clearly setting out what we aim to do and how we plan to achieve it and is well understood and supported politically and organisationally.

The introduction of an Annual Delivery Plan for each financial year is used to monitor and report our progress against our aspirations for the lifespan of the Corporate Plan. We also continue to work alongside our partners in the Gwent Public Service Board (PSB) by working together to become a 'Marmot' region with the intent of taking evidence-based action to reduce inequalities and address key challenges to current and long-term well-being across the region, to reduce the inequities that affect the wider determinants of health.

A number of sessions have been held with staff across the organisation focused on embedding the Marmot principles throughout the organisation and into service delivery for all areas of the Council. Work was undertaken with senior managers to establish a number of key indicators to measure over the life of the Plan and which will be included within business plans. Each service area is therefore gaining a better understanding of how they are having a direct impact on delivering the Marmot principles.

Our Masterplan, based on the Marmot Principles, will provide future leaders with a clear vision for the county. It will help us stay focused and will inform our actions and decisions for our future. This long-term planning will help us know where we want to go and the best way to get there. Our current and future Corporate Plans will continue to be important milestones along the way, but together with our Masterplan, this will allow us to foresee challenges, prepare for them and make sure that our daily actions match our ultimate goals.

Joint Executive Team

The Council has a structure in place to support the delivery of services and decision making via its Joint Executive Team (JET). JET has operated with interim arrangements for over a year including an interim Chief Executive. In January 2025 Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent Council's agreed to operate under one Joint Chief Executive. Following this, arrangements were put in place to support and stabilise the senior management structure within both Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen with permanent positions established. Work is ongoing to create a permanent structure below the Corporate Directors and should be in place before the end of 2025.

Political Structure

In 2021, the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales reformed the ward boundaries of Blaenau Gwent. The changes meant that the number of Blaenau Gwent councillors reduced by 9, taking the council from 42 to 33 members. This equates to an average of 1,545 electors per councillor. The number of wards also reduced from 16 to 14, with each ward electing more than 1 councillor. 9 wards have 2 councillors, while 5 wards have 3 councillors, and 5 wards saw no change under the reform. These changes came into being from May 2022, as part of the local government election. Following the election there was a change to the political make up of Blaenau Gwent Council, moving from being Independent to Labour. The political make-up of the Council is currently:

- Labour 21;
- Independent 10;



- Minority Independent (Cwm Ward) 1; and
- Minority Independent (Ebbw Vale South) 1.

Democratic Process

Council committees are an essential part of the democratic process within the Authority. They enable elected members to exercise their decision-making powers, scrutinise the performance and policies of the Council, and represent the views and interests of their constituents. Council committees also provide a forum for public participation and engagement, where citizens and stakeholders can voice their opinions, concerns, and suggestions on matters impacting them and their communities. Council committees aim to conduct their business in an open, transparent, and accountable manner, and to uphold the principles of good governance and public service.

The Cabinet is effectively the decision making body of the Council. It has responsibility for making decisions which are in line with the Council's overall policies and budget. If it wishes to make a decision which is outside the budget or policy framework, this must be referred to the Council as a whole. Members have the responsibility to ensure that the necessary business of the Council is carried out efficiently, effectively, and in a manner appropriate for the proper conduct of public business. The Cabinet carry out all of the Local Authority functions which are not the responsibility of any other part of the Authority, whether by law or under the Constitution.

The 33 Blaenau Gwent elected members are collectively the decision making body for the Authority. This is complemented by an officer structure of trained and experienced people. Most policy decisions are developed by the Cabinet, which comprises the Leader of the Council and four Cabinet Members with individual portfolio responsibilities:



Cllr Steve Thomas
Leader of the
Council
Cabinet Member
Corporate and
Performance



Cllr Helen Cunningham
Deputy Leader of
the Council
Cabinet Member
Place and
Environment



Cllr John C Morgan
Cabinet Member
Place and
Regeneration



Cllr Sue Edmunds
Cabinet Member
People and
Education

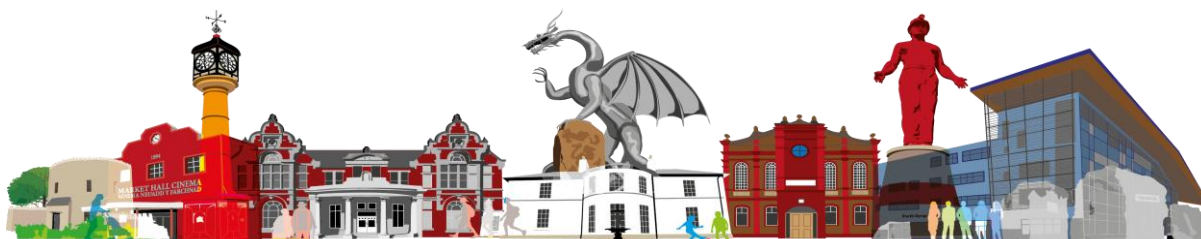


Cllr Hadyn Trollope
Cabinet Member
People and Social
Services

In addition to the Cabinet, the Authority's Committee structure also comprises three decision making Committees: 1 x Planning and 2 x Licensing; four Scrutiny Committees; a Standards Committee; a Democratic Services Committee; and a Governance and Audit Committee.

Scrutiny is made up of non-Cabinet Members who are appointed to sit on the Committees to support the work of the Cabinet and the Council as a whole and to hold the Cabinet to account. The Committees have no decision making powers; however, they act as a check and balance on the powers exercised and decisions taken by Cabinet. Scrutiny enables non-Cabinet Members to have a greater say in Council matters.

Our Governance and Audit Committee is firmly embedded within our governance arrangements. The committee is made up of 6 local authority elected members and 3 lay members - one of which holds the role of the Chair. A mix of both local authority members and lay members further strengthens the level of independent challenge within the committee. The committee has a key oversight and assurance role in areas such as risk management, financial management, and our Complaints process. Another critical role of the committee is to



provide assurance that the Council is responding appropriately and effectively to reports from our external regulators.

Any recommendations made by Audit Wales and our other external regulators, are received by the relevant Scrutiny Committee for monitoring and then by the Governance and Audit Committee to be assured of progress. This is the Council's key document to demonstrate how accepted proposals for improvement / agreed recommendations received, are being addressed.

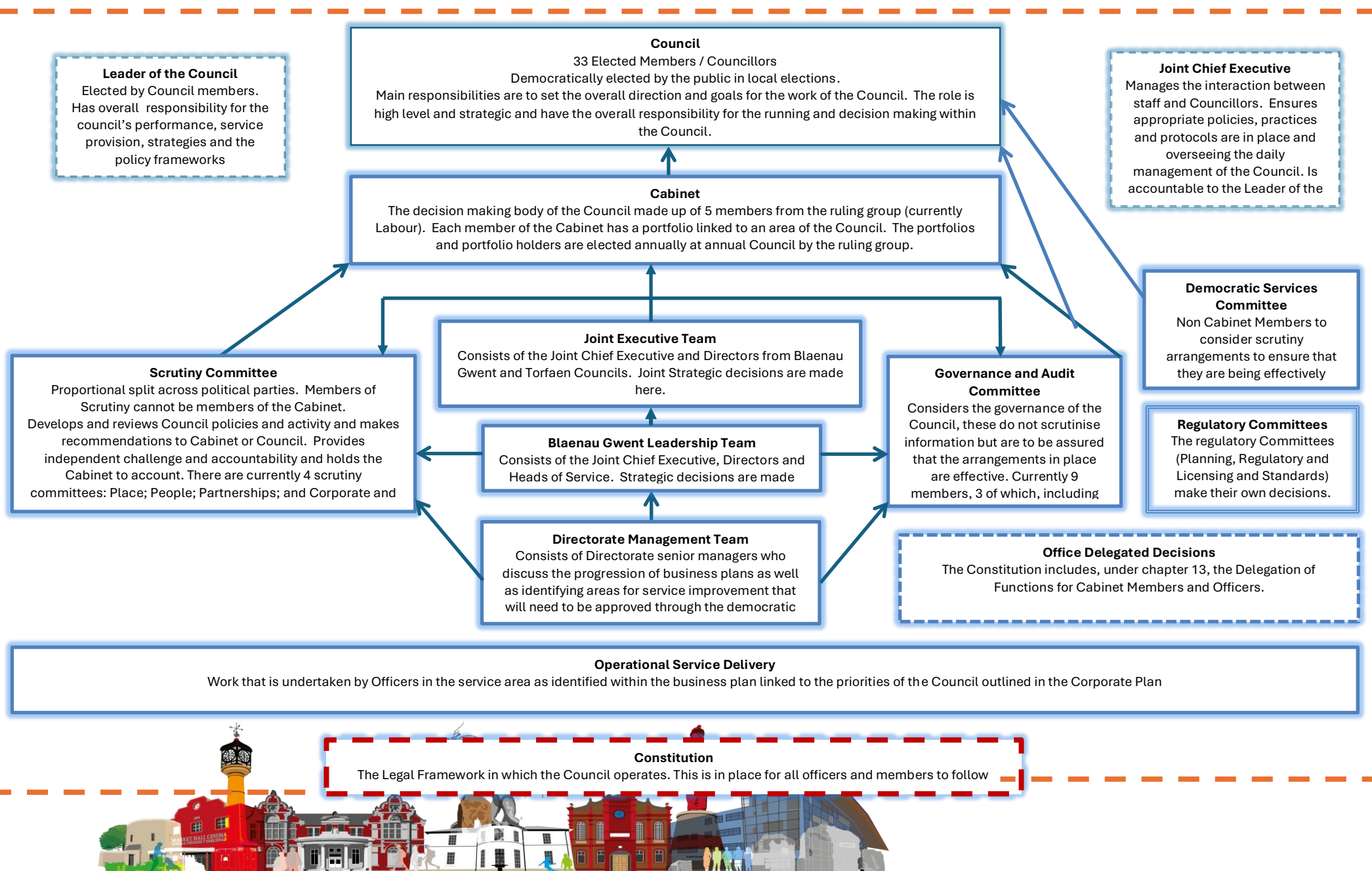
Our Action Plan is updated and reported on a regular basis to provide assurance to the Governance and Audit Committee. Monitoring of service specific recommendations is the responsibility of the Council's scrutiny committees, with annual progress updates being prepared for the Governance and Audit Committee for assurance purposes.

Strong democratic governance is a key element to us being a well-managed organisation and is therefore critical to meeting our performance requirements.

Committee Meetings and papers can be found here: blaenau-gwentintranet.moderngov.co.uk/ieDocHome.aspx?Categories=



Blaenau Gwent Council Governance Structure



Reaching Net Zero

The Councils journey towards reaching Net Zero by 2030 continues with the implementation of the [Decarbonisation plan 2020 -2030](#). This year we will be conducting a midpoint review of our Decarbonisation Plan. The focus will be on maximising our carbon reductions by targeting our largest non-procurement emissions sources. The review will have two phases:

The first phase will have two main elements breaking down in detail:

- Our progress so far and;
- What still needs to be done to reach Net Zero.

The second phase:

- Will develop more detailed projections of carbon reductions, costs and timescales. With the aim of covering both our full path to Net Zero and provide an estimate of how much progress we will be able to make by 2030 given the available resources.

Our latest available figures for Net Zero 2030 are show below. These direct carbon emissions figures exclude our spend based procurement emissions figures which are not suitable for tracking progress and for which we are also far more reliant on actions by others to reach Net Zero for these emissions.

Tonnes CO2e/year	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	Change from Base Year	Change from Last Year
Non-Spend Based Carbon Emissions	14,783	11,818	13,100	12,353	11,949	11,381	-23%	-5%

Our buildings have been identified as our largest emissions source. In the last year we have placed significant focus on taking action to decarbonise our schools. This has included working with the Welsh Government Energy Service to develop an ongoing solar programme for schools, including air source heat pumps at Glyncoed Primary and Ysgol Gymraeg Tredegar to support them in being fully Net Zero.

We are also working on reducing energy demand from buildings such as The Works: Ebbw Vale Leisure Centre, Ebbw Fawr Learning Community Campus, and the General Offices to support potential energy savings, carbon emission reductions, and cost savings.

In relation to Net Zero 2050, this year a Citizens' Forum was organised on the Future of Travel in Blaenau Gwent (with funding from Innovate UK). The Forum agreed a set of 10 recommendations for actions that the council and/or its partners could realistically take over the next 5 years to improve travel in Blaenau Gwent, as well as a set of fairness principles to inform how these are taken forward.

The ten recommendations made by the forum were:

1. Reduce car use for commutes
2. Increase transport options for the evening
3. Always have wheelchair ramps on trains
4. Improve taxi services
5. Encourage people to walk cycle or wheel
6. Improve public engagement in transport planning
7. Increase flecsi bus publicity, capacity and funding



8. Provide better options for school journeys
9. Explore taking buses back in public ownership
10. Promote and expand community transport schemes

The recommendations have been presented by members of the forum to an elected members briefing session and to the Blaenau Gwent Local Well-being partnership. The council will provide forum members with progress updates every six months for at least the next two years. The first detailed response is scheduled for September, after a workshop with officers and partners and review through the democratic process.

Carbon reduction is considered in all commissioning and procurement sourcing strategies. Depending upon the nature and scope of each requirement, this may relate to product specifications, operating methodologies and/or supplier carbon reduction plans, which sets out a supplier's current carbon footprint and organisational initiatives designed to reduce future carbon omissions.

We are working with Welsh Government and the WLGA, via the National Procurement Network, in developing a common approach to using Carbon Reduction Plans within our procurement processes. This approach has been developed by 10 Councils across the Southeast Wales Procurement Network, to ensure a consistent approach across the region, and to support the achievement of our respective 2030 Net Zero target.

The performance of our Carbon Footprint, associated with the Council's Commissioning and Procurement activities, is circa 75% - 80%, which is consistent across other Welsh local authorities.

Citizens' Forum on the Future of Travel in Blaenau Gwent

The recent Citizens' Forum on the Future of Travel in Blaenau Gwent was organised by Blaenau Gwent Council and funded by Innovate UK, the UK Government's innovation agency, as part of their Net Zero Living programme. The forum was made up of 21 Blaenau Gwent residents who were selected to be representative of the borough by sortition lottery from 6,500 randomly selected households. The sortition process selected people to be representative in terms of demographics, concern about climate change, number of cars in household and distance of travel to services.

The Forum was asked the question: *'How can Blaenau Gwent come together to make local travel fairer, greener and better for everyone?'*

The forum took place over three, in-person, full day sessions in January and February 2025, and gave forum members a chance to hear from expert speakers to learn about the issues and discuss them in small groups with facilitation from public involvement charity Involve. The forum agreed ten recommendations (see page 22 of Appendix A), for local actions that could be realistically taken in the next five years by the council and/or its partners.

As part of the forum process, the Council committed to provide a full written response to the ten recommendations and hold an in-person meeting to present back. We are currently in the process of developing this response, supported by Involve, with relevant officers and stakeholders from the council and partners organisation meeting on Tuesday 30th September. The intention following this is to bring the proposed response back through the Democratic process in December 2025 /January 2026. Following approval, the intention is that the response will become a live document, with six monthly updates to forum members for a least two years after the initial response.



An High Performing Council that

- communicates council priorities and expectations
- is always learning and looking to improve
- measures what matters to residents and communities
- uses self-evaluation to focus on impact and outcomes
- understands its purpose and delivers its functions effectively

Performance Management

As part of the Federated approach the Council has streamlined its performance management processes to align with Torfaen Council. This has included enhancements to audit processes and amending performance reporting schedules so that both authorities receive performance information simultaneously, promoting collaboration and transparency.

The Council's Well-being Objectives, within the Corporate Plan, have been used to shape all service planning throughout the organisation. The internal business plans that track progress and performance across the organisation have been revised to include key structural changes and officer responsibilities, aligning with the strategic vision and enhancing priorities to ensure they are outcome focused. These business plans will continue to evolve to reflect the changes across the organisation.

Future adjustments to the performance monitoring processes across the organisation will include a review of the annual delivery plan to ensure actions are outcome-oriented, continuous amendments to business plans to accommodate directorate changes, and the implementation of internal governance arrangements to integrate performance monitoring into council-wide discussions.

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 regards effective self-assessment as fundamental to enabling Councils to understand how they're performing and where they could do better. Our performance reporting arrangements are therefore critical to the Council's response to the Act.

Aligned with the ethos of the Act, our Performance Management Framework is as much about implementing changes to processes, as it is about fostering a new culture of continuous self-assessment and improvement in the Council, by placing a much greater prominence on service-planning and the importance of routine performance monitoring.

Our business plans have been developed to ensure that there is 'golden thread' from the Marmot Masterplan, to the Corporate Plan, to business plans and within strategic policies and strategies. Routine monitoring of business plans enables the Council to monitor key actions associated with the Corporate Plan and delivery plan. Our approach therefore continues to be carefully nurtured, supported and challenged, as it develops, ensuring it is working as expected, across the Council.

We have begun making use of available data that is on the Data Cymru hub; to benchmark our performance and more recently we have been working with other local authorities and Data Cymru, in order to further develop this system and the availability of comparative information.

The Joint Executive Team has a strong focus on performance, through an agreed twelve weekly performance schedule. This provides a specific focus on each directorate's performance, relating to risks, progress against our Corporate Plan and 'deep dive' investigations into areas of performance causing concern.

Reporting against our Corporate Plan is taken through our Democratic Process on an annual basis.

To take our aspiration of becoming a high performing Council to the next level we need to become more data and intelligence driven going forward. Throughout the year and moving into the next there has been a targeted



approach to reviewing service priorities and the data that will support the evidencing of delivery.

Work has also started on the use of Power BI for our data presentation and the establishment of real time data being available to assist with monitoring purposes. This key piece of work will continue throughout 2025/26 with the aim of getting the majority of report utilising Power BI and also the integration of Power BI with some Council systems.

Communication

The Council provided messages throughout the year that included updates on emergencies such as Storm Bert, Storm Darrah, and the Cwmtillery coal tip landslide. These communications supported resident evacuations and informed elected members, the community, and the press. The federated council approach with Torfaen has also been communicated regularly within the organisation. Communication teams from both Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen will collaborate more closely as part of this approach, this includes Blaenau Gwent using the same software as Torfaen for communication messages. The outcomes from this joint working will be reported in the next self-assessment report.

A Collaborative and Inclusive Council that

Cherishes inclusivity and equality
Recognises the contribution of others
Welcomes challenge and communication from colleagues, peers and partners
Focuses on strengths of partners and communities
Is open to sharing resources with partners and communities
Welcomes ideas and is open to support to deliver its strategic priorities

Equalities

The 2024-28 Strategic Equality [Plan](#) (SEP) was published in April 2024 and the first Annual [Report](#) for the plan highlights the council's ongoing efforts to promote equality and inclusion, while also identifying areas for improvement and future actions.

To facilitate the year one action plan the council has established a Strategic Oversight and Delivery Group, which is responsible for reviewing and monitoring our progress on each action related to our Strategic Objectives. By aligning these actions with our business planning processes, we have ensured that they are effectively tracked and continuously improved. The group, chaired by Councillor Chris Smith, our Equality Member Champion, who also represents the Council on the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) Members Equality Network.

The council has introduced an Equality E Learning Module for all staff through its training platform, Thinqi. Additionally, Elected Members have also been encouraged to complete the training. Elected Members have received several member Briefing sessions on key equality matters including Gypsy Traveller and LGBT+ History Month and Diverse Cymru's Cultural Competency Scheme.

Throughout this reporting period, as an organisation we have continued to recognise and mark international campaigns, including, Black History Month, Holocaust Memorial Day, LGBTQ+ History Month and International Women's Day.

The Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process remains a crucial tool for facilitating and informing our decision-making processes. Recognising the need for improvement, we have identified better monitoring of the IIA's usage as a key action for the 2025-26 period. This will be a primary focus in our Year 2 action plan to ensure the process is effectively utilised and continuously improved. Moving forward we are committed to addressing actions, requests, and complaints from the public related to equality. These will be thoroughly reviewed, and appropriate measures will be taken. All such matters will be documented and reported to



members through our annual reporting process, ensuring transparency and accountability.

Blaenau Gwent Pride

Throughout 2024/25, the Council, as part of its Strategic Equalities Plan, prioritised LGBTQ+ rights and planning activities to take forward into 2025/26. As part of this, Blaenau Gwent held its first Pride festival in May 2025; a grassroots initiative driven by the passion and efforts of local individuals and community groups. With volunteers at its heart, the event reflected the power of coming together to create something meaningful, even on a modest scale. From organising activities to bringing people together, this celebration truly belongs to the Blaenau Gwent community. The event represents the strength and heart of our community, led by passionate individuals who believe in making Blaenau Gwent a place of acceptance and understanding. It's about taking meaningful steps toward inclusion in a way that feels personal and approachable.

Gwent Public Service Board (GPSB) Joint Scrutiny Committee

Blaenau Gwent Council has been appointed as the host authority to undertake the administrative arrangements and provide dedicated support and advisers for the GPSB Joint Scrutiny Committee. The aim of the Committee is to scrutinise the effectiveness of the GPSB by reviewing the decisions made, or actions taken by the Board; scrutinising the Board's governance arrangements; and to make recommendations based on this to the Board. The Committee has met four times between April 2024 and June 2025 and has considered items that included:

- Gwent Well-being Plan 2023-28 - Delivery Plan Development;
- Gwent Well-Being Plan Annual Report 2024;
- Gwent Public Services Board Delivery Framework: Best Start in Life;
- Everyone Lives in a Place they Feel Safe: Community Safety Review & Strategic Safe Communities Partnership Board;
- Best Start in Life: PSB Progress Update;
- Climate & Nature Area of Focus Progress Report;
- Fast Track Gwent; and
- Gwent Well-being Plan Annual Report 2025.

Town and Community Councils

Town and Community Councils (TCCs) can help the Council understand the issues that impact the local community. The Council continues to engage with TCCs on a range of issues including the Council budget.

There are four TCCs in Blaenau Gwent:

- Tredegar Town Council;
- Nantyglo & Blaina Town Council;
- Abertillery & Llanhilleth Community Council; and
- Brynmawr Town Council.

In 2024/25, the Council and the four TCCs continued to build upon existing liaison arrangements and worked in partnership to develop a refreshed Charter of Common Agreement. The new Charter promotes best practices and shared principles like openness, respect, honesty, and prioritising citizens. To date not all TCC's have signed the Charter, and further conversation is required to get full sign off.

The Council and all TCCs publicised the signing of the Armed Forces Covenant, a pledge of mutual support between local civilian and Armed Forces communities, as well as working together on Budget development, Christmas Adornments on Streetlights, Anti-Social Behaviour reporting, and well-being event planning & promotion.



A forward work programme has been designed with monitoring and review processes incorporated. This approach will not only improve guidance and engagement with TCCs in the future but also allow partners to ensure that the joint commitments outlined in the Charter stay appropriate and relevant over time.

A Well Managed Council that

- Embraces its core values
- Values the well-being and contribution of staff
- Invests in staff and has plans for a future workforce
- Has good governance to ensure robust decision making

Workforce

The Council continues to be the largest employer within the borough, employing 1,728 people excluding school-based staff or 3,000 when including school based staff. 73% of the Council's workforce are in permanent roles which provides a stability within the establishment, this is a slight reduction from last year when those in permanent roles were at almost 75%. 12% of staff are in fixed term positions and 11% are relief positions. The majority of relief positions are in Catering & Cleaning and Social Services, which is consistent with what you would expect from the nature of the workforce in these areas. Vacancies remain consistent, with over 90% of roles filled in each directorate. Over half of the workforce remains 'service based' with the remaining staff split between home workers at 7%, and agile workers at 36%. 50% of the workforce has more than 10 years' service.

The Council has a low level of diversity amongst the workforce, 65% (of those who have provided the information) have indicated that they identify as British, Welsh, English, Scottish, Northern Irish. (This is reflective of the community). Promoting diversity in the workforce will continue to be a key priority as part of the Council's Workforce Strategy. The Council has an ageing workforce where 56% of the workforce is over the age of 46, with 10% of the workforce aged 29 and under.

Investing in Blaenau Gwent future workforce

The Aspire Shared Apprenticeship Programme within Blaenau Gwent is a strategic project with a number of partners, Ebbw Vale Enterprise Zone, Education, Industries and Blaenau Gwent County. The programme is set to enhance skills development within the manufacturing and engineering companies to develop business growth; whilst tackling unemployment and providing aspirational opportunities for young people.

External Aspire Apprentices	Internal Aspire Apprentices	Aspire Children Looked After
Total Number of Apprentices 139	Total number of Apprentices 41	Number of referrals from 14+ team 27
Number of Apprentices Currently on Programme 41	Number of Apprentices currently on programme 14	Number of work placements/ traineeships facilitated 18
Percentage that live in BG 47%	Percentage that live in BG 70%	Number of those now in employment 7
Percentage that are male 84%	Percentage that are male 44%	
Percentage that are female 16%	Percentage that are female 56%	
	Number of Apprentices have moved into employment 17	

Annual Governance Statement 2023/24

The Annual Governance Statement (AGS) is developed using CIPFA/Solace's Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework (2016). Welsh Government anticipates that relevant bodies will prepare an annual governance statement on internal control using the CIPFA/Solace Framework to best represent proper practices in relation to the statement on internal control which requires an annual governance statement to be produced.



As best practice CIPFA recommends that:

- a full draft version of the AGS should accompany the statement of accounts; and
- the AGS should be approved by members meeting as a whole committee at the same time as the statement of accounts is approved under Regulation 10(2) in Wales.

The final Annual Governance [Statement](#) 2023/24 was presented to Governance and Audit Committee on 28th July 2025, alongside the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts as per CIPFA Guidance. At this time there were no amendments to the report. Owing to the delays in reporting the AGS alongside the Statement of Accounts, the AGS covers the year 2023/24 but provides detail up to June 2025 where possible.

The statement is collated following evidence gathering exercise which calls upon a number of sources including:

- Internal and external regulatory reports;
- Annual Report of the Audit and Risk Manager; and
- Senior Manager Assurance Statements.

Code of Governance 2023/24

The Authority has had a Code of Governance in place since 2010. This Code sets out the Governance Framework for the Authority setting out our approach and commitment to achieving and maintaining good corporate governance within the organisation. Good corporate governance ensures that the Council is accountable, transparent, effective, and efficient in delivering services and fulfilling our responsibilities to our citizens and stakeholders.

The Code demonstrates that in most areas we have effective governance arrangements in place which are continually improving, but also recognise that there is further work to do. The code is reviewed on an annual basis to ensure it reflects the current governance arrangements of the Authority. The Code forms the basis against which the Annual Governance Statement is produced and outlines seven core principles which helps to achieve good governance. The latest Code of Governance can be found [here](#). The 2024/25 Code of

Governance is to be presented to Governance and Audit Committee following the reporting of the Annual Governance Statement 2023/24.

Peer Panel Assessment (PPA) 2024

In November 2024, Blaenau Gwent Council held their first Peer Panel Assessment as part of the requirements under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. The Act's regard for effective self-assessment is fundamental to enabling the Council to understand how we are performing and where we could do better, and this is very much aligned to our beliefs which have underpinned the development of our new systems and processes.

The PPA examined the councils' position in relation to the three performance duties as well as

- Member/officer relations;
- Sustainability (finance, demand, transformation);
- The Marmot policy commitment; and
- The Discovery Phase (federation).

Throughout the PPA leadership, culture and readiness to deliver were also considered.



The panel concluded that:

- the council effectively exercises its functions within the challenging demographic and financial constraints it faces;
- There are a number of strengths such as stable leadership, a long-term vision, improved strategic decision-making, and greater accountability;
- There is widespread support for the proposed federation;
- There is a clear understanding of its role and has outlined a new vision in its corporate plan;
- The cross-cutting nature of the corporate plan can promote shared ownership throughout the organisation, which can help align resources with key priorities;
- The adoption of the Marmot Principles in Blaenau Gwent has the potential to be a significant step forward in addressing deep-rooted deprivation;
- The workforce is an asset- loyal, committed, and passionate about serving the community; and
- The council's 'Bridging the Gap' program outlines plans to address medium-term revenue pressures, incorporating all the typical elements of such a strategy.

Overall strengths were recognised as:

- A dynamic interim Chief Executive actively engaged in the role, who has improved the clarity and accountability of the council's leadership structure;
- The interim Chief Executive (CEX) and the Leader of the council have gained strong trust and backing from all levels within the council, reflecting a high level of confidence in their leadership abilities;
- The council operates within a Welsh public sector that is facing significant sustainability challenges. In response to these challenges, the council is embarking on a radical intervention through a proposed federation with Torfaen Council;
- The adoption of the Marmot Principles in Blaenau Gwent is an important step, as it directly acknowledges the significant challenges the area faces, particularly around health inequalities and social determinants of health;
- Partners were complimentary of the way the council has shared its corporate plan and priorities, setting clear expectations that partner priorities should align wherever possible. By aligning resources and priorities with partners, the council demonstrates its commitment to addressing local issues more effectively and improving outcomes for the community;
- The panel's findings highlight a work environment characterised by professionalism and mutual respect. At the strategic level, there is clear evidence that the leadership team is aligned with the council's goals,
- demonstrating a strong commitment to collaboration in achieving these objectives. This alignment between leadership and organisational goals is positively received by both staff and Elected Members;
- The council's engagement and participation strategy is outreach-focused, using various methods to gather diverse community voices; and
- The council shows a strong commitment to workforce development, staff wellbeing, and engagement.

In responding to the PPA report, the legislation requires the Council to respond to:

- The extent to which we accept the conclusions in the report;
- The extent to which the council intends to follow any recommendations contained in the report; and
- Any actions it proposes to take to increase the extent to which it meets the performance requirements (an Action Plan).

The statement for the "the extent to which we accept the conclusions in the report" is as follows:

"The Council accepts the report and its conclusions. It notes that the Assessment was a useful process in order to drive improvement across the Council. The Council requested for additional areas to be considered by the Panel and this was supported and informed the final recommendations."



For future Assessments, we would welcome greater content in the final report on the evidence seen which has led to each recommendation”.

The statement for the “extent to which the council intends to follow any recommendations contained in the report” is as follows:

“The Council accepts all recommendations made in the PPA report and has put in place an Action Plan setting out how it will take each recommendation forward. It should be noted that this Assessment has been done at a particular point in time and progress has already happened quickly around some areas”.

A total of 15 recommendations were provided to the Council. The recommendations have been used to establish an action plan in order to appropriately respond and implement the findings. The findings and action plan can be found [here](#).

Staff Survey

In November 2024, the Council conducted an anonymous staff survey to assess employees' perspectives on working for the organisation. The survey addressed topics including job responsibilities, work environment, communication, and management practices. Of the 1,857 non-school-based staff members invited to participate, 784 responded, resulting in an overall response rate of 42%, which represents a slight decrease from 45% in 2019. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with various statements, choosing from: strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree. Some of the results from the survey included that 75% of respondents were able to strike the right balance between their work and home life, whilst 68% of staff felt they have opportunities to develop new skills. The results from the survey will be used to drive improvements and make internal changes across the organisation.

An Engaging and Accessible Council that

- uses a wide range of tools to engage with residents and stakeholders
- involves staff and residents on issues that affect them
- harnesses ideas come from customers and staff
- is open and honest with staff and residents
- shares timely information, advice and guidance and celebrates success

Engagement and Participation

Engagement, participation, and customer experience are vital themes that influence the Council's service design and decision-making processes. The Council is dedicated to long-term community support and aims to achieve this through active community engagement. Effective engagement is essential for the Council's efficient operation, ensuring that the services provided are suitable and meet the needs of users.

In June 2024 the Council’s new Engagement and Participation Strategy was approved. This sets out why we need to engage, who with and how we will achieve this. We will use the same principle for the participation element, although this will be more specific to address the requirements detailed in section 4 of this report to ensure that local people are able to participate in the making of decisions by the council.

In order to develop the strategy a public consultation was held with 170 responses received. Common themes from the engagement included:

- Targeted engagement with young people, older people, the digitally excluded and hard to reach communities;
- Providing and acting on feedback from consultations and engagement activity e.g. ‘You said, we did...’ communications;
- Availability of hard copy surveys, leaflets and consultation documents where possible;



- Optimise timing of face-to-face engagement activity or online meetings to ensure working people can participate;
- Ensuring a consistent, easy to understand engagement approach is used by all departments across the Council; and
- Making use of the Community Hubs as an opportunity for people to take part in engagement activity.

There were also some more negative comments received about the number of surveys and consultation exercises carried out (consultation fatigue) and a perception that the Council doesn't listen to responses.

Some common themes for participation emerging from the consultation responses to be considered through the Action Plan included:

- Optimise timing of committee meetings to ensure working people can participate;
- Providing more information about the decision-making process and decisions or outcomes from committee meetings via communications channels;
- Increased opportunities for people to engage directly with councillors, either face-to-face or via online MS Teams or Zoom meetings;
- Encourage people to participate in local democracy, with 80-90% of respondents wanting to see 'more' opportunities to find out how the Council works and attend, watch, speak or submit questions to Committee meetings; and
- Some interest in learning more about the role of a County Borough Councillor and how to become one in future.

There were also some more negative comments received evidencing some misconceptions about the role and salary of a Councillor, which could be addressed through a continued targeted myth busting communications campaign and information with the resident survey to raise awareness.

In 2024/25 the Council has successfully carried out a Staff Survey across the Council and also have facilitated participation of local residents in the nationally driven local Resident Survey with over 1,800 people taking part.

Freedom of the Borough – Steve Jones MBE

Marathoner Steve Jones MBE, OLY has received the Freedom of the County Borough of Blaenau Gwent for his outstanding contribution to the world of running.

Councillors bestowed the honour at a meeting of the Council, with record breaking Steve (well known as 'Jonesy') in attendance live from his home in Colorado, United States. Family and friends also dialled in for the momentous occasion.

2024 marked the 40th anniversary of Steve Jones' momentous victory at the Chicago Marathon in 1984, a triumph that captivated the world and solidified his place in athletic history. On that day in 1984, Jones, from Ebbw Vale, not only crossed the finish line first but also shattered records, demonstrating an extraordinary blend of grit, determination, and sheer willpower. He set a new world record, completing the course in a remarkable 2 hours, 8 minutes, and 5 seconds.

This month also marks 40 years since Steve took the London Marathon title. His list of running achievements is impressive and can be found [here](#).



An application has been made to place a 2.85-metre-high statue to commemorate Steve Jones at Ebbw Vale Sports Centre. The project is being delivered by a group that includes the Local Authority, Aneurin Leisure



Trust, Councillors and a representative who fundraised for the project.

The sculpture, to be mounted on a locally quarried limestone boulder is to be a silhouette showing Steve Jones wearing the number 10 breaking the world record in 1984 when winning the Chicago Marathon.

Resident survey

Let's Talk: Living in Blaenau Gwent survey was undertaken in October/November 2024 and was undertaken by Data Cymru, a branch of the Welsh Government, on behalf of Blaenau Gwent local authority.

The survey was for Blaenau Gwent residents to assist the Council to better understand:

- What is important to you;
- Your experience of your local area; and
- How you view and interact with the Council.

Responses were received from 1,809 Blaenau Gwent residents. The survey providing valuable insights into various aspects of living in Blaenau Gwent. The survey covered demographics, health, satisfaction with the local area, safety, council services, and interactions with the council.

The responses are now being used to help shape the local area and local services.

Member champions

There are a number of Member Champions in place who represent specific key areas of work. The Member Champions are:

- Equalities, Welsh Language and Diversity;
- Age Friendly;
- Smart Money, Poverty and Inequality;
- Climate Mitigation;
- Armed Forces;
- Wellbeing; and
- Digital.

We communicate openly and honestly with residents and Members. This communication is frequent and through variety of mediums, which has proven to be highly productive, with large amounts of interactions and feedback. We celebrate our successes well and are open and honest in areas where our plans have not been delivered, as intended.

A Financially Astute Council that

- has robust financial governance
- successfully manages resources and seeks value for money
- generates income where appropriate
- maximises inward investment
- invests in preventative services

Audit Wales undertook a review of the Council's Financial Sustainability in 2023/24 and found that, *'the Council has appropriate arrangements in place to support its financial sustainability, but these will only be effective if it works at pace to identify, approve and implement sufficient savings to reduce its medium-term funding gap in a sustainable way'*.

In response the Council responded to the two recommendations identified by Audit Wales. This has included the Bridging the Gap programme which remains the Council's strategic approach to achieving financial



efficiencies and improving financial stability while setting a balanced budget. The Strategic Business Reviews are structured around the following themes:

- Income Generation;
- Asset Optimisation; and
- Collaboration and service redesign.

The progress against Bridging the gap projects are reported to members on a quarterly basis. The Council has also agreed to explore closer collaborative working with Torfaen County Borough Council, it is anticipated that this will result in more resilient services and potential cost efficiencies. Implementation of identified opportunities will form the basis of an agreed Transformation Programme over the next 3 years.

Budget Engagement

The Budget for 2025/26, was agreed by Council in early 2025 supported by an engagement programme which operated in early following the announcement of the Local Government Settlement in mid-December 2024 by Welsh Government. Due to the tight timeframes following the announcement, the approach for 2025/26 was agreed to be a budget poll, supported by social media promotion, and processes to support people taking part at our community hubs. The intention of all of this was to get people participating and sharing their views on prioritising council services and setting council tax.

A total of 817 respondents took part in the poll, which equates to just over 1% of the area's population. This response rate is slightly up from last year when 680 responses were received. This is broadly in-line with expected response rates for budget engagement processes from previous years and is the second highest response rate for budget engagement carried out by the Council.

The feedback from the budget consultation was presented to Council and was taken on board as part of the budget setting process for the year.

A Digital and Data Led Council that

- uses data to anticipate needs
- builds digital profiles to better understand customer journeys
- is always on – enabling residents to access a wide range of digital services
- actively involves residents through digital inclusion and digital platforms

Customer Services Strategy

After reassessing our Customer Services delivery model, last year the Council launched a new Customer Services [Strategy](#) to focus on delivering positive customer experiences, supporting staff to resolve customer queries at first contact and utilising technology effectively.

The Council continues to implement the strategy for 2024/2025 through a variety of programmes which includes training for customer-facing roles in our Contact Centre, community hubs, and benefit service equipping all corporate customer-facing staff with core customer service skills.

To test the criteria and gather insights into our Customer Services [Standards](#) and Customer Services [Charter](#) which was launched alongside the strategy, a pilot was conducted, and surveys were introduced to understand customer feedback and help improve service delivery. However, engagement has proven challenging, with only around 9% of surveys issued by the Contact Centre being returned, and approximately 13% of surveys issued by hubs being completed in a face-to-face setting.

Next year, we will review the strategy's impact on service delivery and customer experience, extend training across the organisation, and use the pilot findings to enhance our charter and standards. We have also



changed the customer survey model for 2025/26, so it now forms part of our new contact centre telephony platform.

Digital Transformation Strategy

The way the public access Council services have changed with more services being delivered online; to help meet the needs of the community and help deliver our services more efficiently the Council launched a Digital Transformation Strategy in 2023/ 2024. The strategy is in its first year of implementation and is one of a set of strategic digital/ICT programmes designed to secure the future sustainability across the community and deliver improved outcomes for our customers, businesses and learners.

In 2024/ 2025 there has been a range of programmes of work to support the delivery of the strategy. This includes:

- Utilising automation technology to improve internal processes;
- Reviewing our websites including content and structure; and
- Transitioning from Telephony to digital communication tools.

A new Digital Transformation [Strategy](#) has been developed for schools, outlining key elements related to the digital learner journey. This strategy is aligned with the Council's Digital Transformation Strategy 2023/27.

A high percentage of those that visit the Community Hubs are identifying as being unable to self-serve. The Council's preferred method of delivering services is via digital means but a high number of Blaenau Gwent people are not digitally able.

We found that:

- 56% of customers digitally self-served when completing service requests; and
- 44% of customers were supported by the Contact centre or Community.

In 2024/25 there has been increased effort to support residents who are digitally excluded. A Digital Exclusion Officer has been appointed to assist residents in the community with getting online, enhancing their digital skills and supporting the community to self-serve.

The Digital Exclusion Officer role is currently funded through Shared Prosperity Funding. Funding has been confirmed for 2025/26, enabling continued integration of the digital exclusion project within the hub model and ongoing support for the Gwent Digital Exclusion Network. However, as funding has not yet been allocated beyond this period, there is a possibility that the project may not continue in the future. The role of supporting residents within the Digital space will be delivered as part of the Community Hub mode and become a sustainable aspect of this moving forward.

A Gwent Digital Exclusion Network has also been set up by the Council to engage with 3rd sector partners to discuss what organisations are currently doing digitally and what organisations digital plans are for the future which enables collaborative working in this space.

Digital

Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, Monmouthshire and Newport City Council, are partners in the Shared Resource Service (SRS) which has successfully supplied technology services for this Council since 2016.

In order to support collaboration and alignment of services, plans are being put in place to create a unified Digital, Data and Technology (Ddat) service aimed at enhancing public service delivery across multiple local authorities. As part of this process, digital teams across Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, Monmouthshire and Newport will transfer into the SRS. Anticipated benefits include:



- Resilience for service development and delivery;
- Increased momentum to meet organisational digital ambitions;
- Maximising skills and capacity and avoiding duplication;
- Wider development opportunities for staff; and
- User centred design shaping services.

The SRS are seeking the creation of a modern, vibrant digital public service that will change the way we serve our citizens and stakeholders.

One Wales Office of Data Analytics

The One Wales Office of Data Analytics (OODA) will be a pioneering initiative, empowering communities of all kinds to shape their own future, in line with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and Marmot principles. We will harness the power of data, not as a tool of top-down control, but as a catalyst for community-led action and decision-making that promotes equitable and sustainable wellbeing for current and future generations. We envision a region where data is accessible, understandable, and used ethically to tackle inequalities and create a fairer society for all.

The OODA will deliver initiatives such as the Joint Approach to Community Wellbeing, known as the JACOB initiative. The OODA will be grounded in the principles of the Nesta Office of Data Analytics work to transform how we deliver public services. This function will focus on enhancing frontline services, generating actionable insights from data, fostering collaboration across agencies, and developing innovative solutions to address complex challenges. The benefits of this approach will be:

- Improved service outcomes for citizens through data-informed service design and delivery
- Increased efficiency, optimised processes and reduced duplication
- Improved resource allocation leading to cost savings
- Enhanced Strategic Decision-Making
- Reduced inequalities by targeting resources and interventions to address inequalities

The Year Ahead and Beyond

Throughout our report we have outlined many of the key challenges we face as an organisation, as well as the key developments we plan to deliver. However, there a small number of central concepts, fundamental to our approach to ensuring future generations are able to meet their needs.

Our focus on the delivery of the Marmot Masterplan and our communities' approach, alongside the delivery of the Corporate Plan, provides a focus on us delivering greater resilience to our communities and residents, to meet their own needs, resulting in much greater independence and less chance of individuals needing costly Council interventions in their lives. We are committed to our aim of radically change the way we operate, making 'communities' and 'wellbeing & prevention' genuine cornerstones in the way we design our services so that we can empower our communities to be healthier, better connected and more equal.

The Blaenau Gwent 'Deal' will look to further empower communities, in a way that shifts meaningful decision-making power to our communities, giving the residents a real voice in how and where resources are spent within their locality, encouraging the people who use services, their families, carers, and professionals to collaborate as equal partners to design, deliver, and evaluate services.



This empowerment will only come with greater autonomy over the resourcing of our communities, transferring the control of budgets and assets previously held by the Council to our residents. The Council will go beyond communities deciding on how public funds are allocated, moving the focus onto involving communities in the design and delivery of public services. Our approach will look to develop a Culture of Collaboration between the Council and communities within Blaenau Gwent, replacing traditional mindsets with meaningful relationships that focus on allowing communities to maximise their strengths, fostering trust and autonomy among public servants and citizens.

As part of this approach, the Council is looking to remodel its services to provide a greater early intervention and prevention approach. The Council will look to move to a prevention-first approach by taking proactive steps to tackle the root causes of inequality. This means designing services that intervene early, invest in community strengths, and aligning resources to reduce future demand.

Every directorate and service area will identify opportunities to prevent demand growing, promote wellbeing, and close gaps in outcomes. We will measure success not just by what we fix, but by what we prevent, ensuring that our actions today build a fairer, healthier, and more resilient communities for tomorrow.

Blaenau Gwent 'Deal'

The Blaenau Gwent 'Deal' will be a contract between the Council and the residents of Blaenau Gwent explaining in simple terms what they can expect from the Council and in return what our residents can do to support the delivery of 5 shared missions:

- **Mission One:** Early Years - Building Bright Futures;
- **Mission Two:** Inspiring Lifelong Learning, Ambition and Resilience;
- **Mission Three:** Wellbeing Through Community Leadership;
- **Mission Four:** Thriving Economy, Vibrant Places; and
- **Mission Five:** Empowered Communities, Shared Power and Success.

The 'Deal' will support our commitment to becoming a Marmot Council and in doing so to sustainably reduce in inequality and inequity in Blaenau Gwent. Our approach recognises that well-being is not just about individual choices or biology. The conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age have a profound impact on their well-being. We must therefore go beyond healthcare to improve health in developing whole-system approaches that tackle the root causes of our problems, developing tailored, inclusive, and long-term solutions. The 'Deal' is our mechanism for bringing this aspiration to life.

Our vision is for a future without inequality, where everyone thrives in a fair, inclusive, and resilient community achieved through create lasting change by building trust, fostering shared responsibility, and driving innovation through strong collaboration between the council, residents, and partners. These plans are ambitious and our approach alongside our partners in Torfaen Council continue to set us aside to other Councils in Wales. We are committed to be a learning authority, acting upon the feedback we receive through close working with the public, partners and our regulators as well as our recent Council wide peer review (panel performance assessment). It is therefore important to continually test whether our actions are delivering the intended benefits. Alongside the new 'Deal' we will implement a new evaluation framework for our work, further strengthening our ongoing and continuous self-assessment and review processes in order to have the greatest impact on improving the well-being of our residents.

Early Intervention and Prevention

A programme of early intervention and prevention (EIP) is being scoped in Blaenau Gwent for implementation in 2025/26, with the aim of enabling residents to remain resilient and to handle a crisis without premature or serious statutory intervention where it is not needed.



The EIP will have alignment to the Blaenau Gwent 'Deal', the Marmot Master Plan and the Council's Corporate Plan, and will be built around the following 10 core principles:

1. Prioritise prevention, independence and wellbeing;
2. Maximise role of the community;
3. Ensure that all roles can provide basic level of information, advice and signpost on full range of crises;
4. Reduction in demand at statutory gateways;
5. Understand the support needs of different cohorts;
6. Viewed as a single prevention system – maximise effectiveness and efficiency for our residents;
7. Minimise referrals between providers, reduce hand offs;
8. Based around single view of an individual;
9. Outcome/impact drives the performance framework and joins up the story behind the data; and
10. Journey mapping- Simplification of systems and structures for customers and minimise handoffs / duplication.

We want 'wellbeing and prevention' to be genuine cornerstones of how we design our Council services. Any Council service that interacts with residents should be there to support residents to stay well without the need for statutory services. This proportional shift towards prevention will help us provide the right support at the right time so that resources can be focussed on those with the greatest need at a time when it is needed most.

Communities Approach

Resilient communities are complex systems involving several different players: residents, community leaders and local councillors, volunteers, community groups, charities, clubs and hubs, pubs, open spaces, shops and cafes, churches, council services, Police, NHS services and more.

The Communities Approach is a wholesale redesign of our prevention model, and the associated staffing structures. The model needs to provide the right support to the right people at the right time, rather than assuming a 'need' for service provision first. Support can come from many places including (for most people most of the time) their own community. They are the first line of prevention and are essential in helping us manage our wellbeing, particularly at times of personal crisis. Working with the Council, our prevention model will look to incentivise communities to focus on local well-being needs, and provide capacity building, research, data and financial support to do so.

An effective community's approach requires all partners to agree to a single vision, principles and strategic outcomes framework for the system. This means that a clear and consistent governance framework needs to be in place at the strategic (Borough), tactical (Community Council) and operational (Ward) level.

Future Blaenau Gwent: A 15 Year Masterplan

Wellbeing, resilience and health equity are the cornerstones of successful and vibrant communities. This is why they are central to the Fairer Gwent (Marmot) report and are at the heart of our Well-being Objectives. As a Council we are proud to be incorporating these principles into our annual Service Plans.

Our annual Service Plans show what we are doing to improve well-being, resilience and health equity across the Borough. We will use these plans to report progress and make judgements on whether or not we have done what we said we were going to do.

But we also need to understand whether what we did has actually made the difference that we intended it to make. We recognise that sustainable change in the ways as set out in the Fairer Gwent report will not always happen overnight. This is why we've produced this 15-year Masterplan. The Masterplan will allow us to monitor the impact that our activities are having over the course of a generation.



We cannot wait until the end of the 15 years to see if our activity is having an impact. So, we will monitor impacts over three distinct periods of time.

1. **By the end of each year.** We can monitor these indicators monthly/quarterly, report on them at the end of each year, and adjust the target for the year ahead.
2. **By the end of this Council term (5 years).** On top of the monthly or quarterly indicators, this also allows us to present data that is only collected annually.
3. **By the end of the Masterplan.** As well as monthly, quarterly & annual indicators, this allows us to monitor truly long-term statistics from a variety of sources such as national studies that will give a definitive view on whether the Council is improving well-being and reducing inequality.

Our Future Blaenau Gwent Masterplan will measure our success against the 8 Marmot Principles that underpin the Council's own Well-being Objectives.

Corporate governance and culture

Extensive work has begun to implement new corporate governance arrangements that also link, where appropriate, to Torfaen processes. During 2025/26 this will continue as a key piece of work in order to implement re focussed Corporate Plan priorities and indicators and making alignment to the Marmot Masterplan and the deal. Work will also continue to enhance our data systems and presentation of data to improve the transparency and accuracy of the information we provide to senior leaders, councillors and the community.

Corporate Safeguarding

As highlighted within the body of the report, Safeguarding is everybody's responsibility and is a crucial area for the Council. The Council needs to accelerate its response to implementing the outstanding recommendations from the Audit Wales review of Corporate Safeguarding.

The Council's Designated Safeguarding Persons (DSPs) Group will have the operational responsibility for addressing the actions within the plan but also to ensure that safeguarding remains high on the agenda across all Council services. This group is responsible to the Council's Executive Team who will act as the Corporate Safeguarding Board. Reports on progress will also be provided through the Scrutiny Committee process.

Next steps for DSPs will be to:

- undertake Group C Safeguarding Training and will be required to provide Group B training to relevant staff;
- awareness raising of roles and responsibilities will also be provided to Elected Members;
- seek approval of the Corporate Safeguarding Strategy;
- review the internet and intranet to ensure that safeguarding resources and information is easily assessable and understandable;
- strengthen the volunteer list information and monitoring mechanisms;
- develop a clear process in respect of contractors working on-site at Council buildings; and
- enhance the corporate performance data available regarding safeguarding.

Counter Fraud Arrangements

As part of their 2024/25 work programme, Audit Wales undertook a review of Blaenau Gwent's Counter Fraud Arrangements. This report, provided to the Council in September 2025, and to be reported formally before the end of the year, highlighted weaknesses in the Council's counter fraud arrangements.

The Crime Survey for England and Wales recognises fraud as one of the most prevalent crimes in society today. Every pound stolen from the public sector means less monies to spend on key Council services.



The Internal Audit Section has established a number of arrangements that will address the finding from Audit Wales. These are to be approved later in 2025 and includes:

- Development of a comprehensive risk assessment of fraud to be adopted across the Council once approved
- The establishment of a joint Counter Fraud Officer post between Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent Council's
- Development of an overarching Counter Fraud Strategy
- Training for all Elected Members in Fraud Awareness to be undertaken in October 2025
- Arrangements for the training of staff are to be developed over 2025/26.

Response to Storm Bert and Flood Management

As highlighted within the self-assessment, some Blaenau Gwent residents were severely impacted by Storm Bert. In response, the Council has in place a Flood Risk Management Group and operational action plan which is being implemented alongside the community.

Community resilience work is underway with two communities affected by flooding during Storm Bert. Community Emergency Hubs are being established, with relevant training being provided in September to the community groups involved in the hubs. These hubs will then be the designated 'place of safety', and a place for communities to meet during a local emergency to coordinate a local community based response. This supportive and proactive approach from the community to assist with flood management arrangements moving forward is a truly positive response and further supports us in our Communities Approach mission.

Social Partnership Duty

The Social Partnership Duty in Wales, introduced under the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023, places a statutory obligation on certain public bodies, including local authorities, to engage meaningfully with recognised trade unions or other staff representatives when setting Well-being Objectives and making strategic decisions. This duty came into force on 1st April 2024 and complements existing obligations under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Its core aim is to embed collaborative working practices into public sector decision-making, ensuring that those delivering public services have a voice in shaping the policies and actions that affect them.

Local authorities must now, 'in so far as is reasonable', seek consensus or compromise with staff representatives at formative stages of policy development. This includes providing sufficient information and time for proper consideration and response. The duty also requires annual reporting: each authority must publish a report detailing how it has complied with the duty, agreed with trade unions where possible, or explaining why agreement was not reached. The Council intends to report annually as to how it has fulfilled its responsibilities under the Social Partnership Duty through this annual Self-Assessment and Well-being report.

The Council has a well-established relationship and works in social partnerships with the recognised trade unions, supported by a formal Facilities Agreement and Joint Consultative Committees that meet regularly throughout the year. The approach gives the opportunity for engagement between Members, Officers and Trade Union representatives on important strategic and policy matters - balancing statutory duties, organisational change, financial pressures and workforce wellbeing. Working in partnership with trade unions in Blaenau Gwent has promoted a culture of mutual respect and trust, recognising that both employer and trade unions share an interest in the future of the Council, delivery of services and fair employment. Consultation and engagement has focused upon the development of the federated model between Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen Councils, committing to transformation, the development of joint roles across both councils and a collaborative approach to sustaining and improving service delivery. It has also provided the opportunity for early engagement in visioning and the strategic direction for the Council in terms of service transformation by managing demand and focussing on early intervention and prevention and community empowerment. Trade Union Representatives have also, through the forum, been consulted and engaged in the priorities in the Corporate Plan that have been brought about by changes to the definitions of work-related



wellbeing goals within the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

In addition to the formal consultative committees that take place the Chief Executive meets with Trade Union Representatives on a bi-monthly basis to discuss strategic and policy developments affecting the council and its employees as well as any operational matters that may be pertinent at the time. The Head of HR also meets with Trade Union Representatives monthly to discuss any operational matters affecting employees and the workplace.

